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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE ANTIQUE VIAL

THE IRON BLOCK DESCENDED AS SWIFTLY AS THE BLADE OF A GUILLOTINE, AND LANDED WITH A CRASH UPON —— THE FLOOR

NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

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THE ANTIQUE VIAL;

OR,

Nick Carter's Curious Mystery.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

ARRESTED FOR MURDER.

"You're wanted, chief. By some one who's badly rattled, too, judging from his voice. He says he must talk with you; no one else will do. Gee! he'll melt the wire, chief, unless he gets you pretty quick."

The speaker was Patsy Garvan, one of Nick Carter's assistants, his second best, in fact, and the scene was the business office in the New York residence of the famous detective.

It was about ten o'clock one morning in June, and Nick and Patsy still were engaged with the morning mail; Chick Carter, the detective's right-hand man, then being in court as a government witness in the notorious Trumbull-Craige forgery and bank-looting case, in which Nick had figured very sensationally in running down and arresting the ringleaders of the gang about a month before.

A telephone call, to which Patsy had quickly responded, gave rise to the foregoing characteristic remarks, and Nick laid aside his partly read letter and turned to the instrument.

"Excited, eh? Did you get his name?" he asked, taking up the receiver.

"Get nothing!" said Patsy tritely. "He talked like a man with loose bearings. His brain must be doing a spiral dip, or——"

"Hello!"

Patsy checked himself when Nick uttered his curt call into the phone, and the subjoined conversation quickly followed.

"Is this Mr. Carter—Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Hannaford is talking—Stanley Hannaford."

"Ah! Is that so?"

"You remember me, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, indeed. What's the trouble?"

"I have just been arrested for murder. If you ever stretched yourself to befriend a man and set him right, do, for Heaven's sake, come to my assistance. I swear

to you I'm innocent, yet everything points to the contrary. Money is no object, Carter, if you'll only come at once. I'll pay any sum you——"

"Stop a moment," Nick interrupted, noting the terrible excitement that imbued the voice of the other. "Calm yourself and answer my questions. Where are you?"

"In the old Ellery mansion in Mount Vernon. You must know the place, and you remember Garside Ellery, the Wall Street banker, who died three years ago."

"Yes, perfectly. What are the circumstances?"

"The place has since been occupied by his only daughter, Doris Ellery. She's the last of the family, and has been living here with only a woman companion, one Nora Bailey, and one general servant, an elderly woman named Penrod. She has been away for several days, but returned this morning."

"The Penrod woman?"

"Yes."

"Omit unimportant details," said Nick. "Who has been murdered?"

"Nora Bailey, Dot's companion."

"Who is Dot?"

"Doris—Miss Ellery."

"What does she know about the fatality?"

"Lord only knows! She is mysteriously missing—has not been seen since yesterday afternoon."

"H'm, is that so?"

"The body of Miss Bailey was found on the library floor soon after Mrs. Penrod arrived this morning. She——"

"Stop again," Nick commanded. "I'll come out there at once and look into the case. Who has arrested you?"

"Captain Kane, of the local police station. He and another officer are now making an investigation. They gave me permission to appeal to you. I fear——"

'One moment, Hannaford."

"Well?"

"Tell Captain Kane that I am on the way and direct him not to disturb anything before I come. We are old friends, and he will comply. I'll be there inside of half an hour."

"Thank God. I'll repay you, Carter, as surely as——"

Nick did not wait to hear more. What he already had heard, in view of the fact that he knew personally, or by reputation, the persons chiefly involved, convinced him that a crime of more than ordinary atrocity had been committed. Five minutes later, accompanied by Patsy Garvan and driven by Danny, his chauffeur, Nick was on his way to the scene of the tragic discovery.

"Who's the Ellery woman, chief?" asked Patsy, after Nick had informed him of the circumstances. "Anybody you know?"

"I knew her father very well," Nick replied, as the speedy touring car swerved into Fifth Avenue. "He was a figure in Wall Street for a time, and a man of sterling integrity. He died suddenly about three years ago, leaving his daughter something like five millions."

"Whew! Quite an incentive to crime."

"He married quite late in life, and was about seventy years old when he died. His wife died when the daughter was born, after which Ellery lost his active interest in business and finally retired. He became melancholy and lived very quietly during his last years, which probably had much to do with shaping the character and habits of his daughter."

"How old is she?"

"About twenty-five."

"Ever seen her?"

"Yes. She's a very attractive girl, but quite reserved and with no fondness for society. She still occupies the Ellery place, which her father owned and occupied for years. It's an extensive estate, with a somewhat rambling old mansion, but is one of the most valuable and picturesque in that section."

"It's mighty curious, chief."

"What is, Patsy?"

"That she is mysteriously missing. That's what Hannaford said, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"She may have killed her companion for some reason, and possibly has bolted," Patsy suggested.

"There's nothing in speculating upon it until we know all of the circumstances," said Nick. "I didn't delay, to question Hannaford."

"He's the same chap who figured in that poisoning case about a year ago, isn't he?"

"Yes, indirectly. The chief figure in that case, Patsy, is dead and gone."

"Doctor David Lascar," nodded Patsy. "He was a bad egg, if there ever was one. What he didn't know about poisons, drugs, and chemicals isn't worth knowing. What was the name of that old fossil from whom he got his knowledge?"

"Exili."

"Lived two hundred years ago, didn't he?"

"More than that. His fund of information, his

knowledge of drugs and herbs, his secret formulas, together with some of the poisons of Exili—all were handed down from father to son for two centuries, until they came into the possession of David Lascar. Since his arrest and conviction for attempting to murder old Mr. Hannaford, I have heard that he was involved in several poison cases abroad. It's a good thing that he's dead and gone."

"Died in prison, didn't he?"

"Yes, about a month ago. His body was bought for dissection by a Doctor Devlin, to whom Lascar himself bequeathed his remains in return for money paid him by Devlin, that he might enjoy a few luxuries during his last illness. Old Hannaford had a narrow escape from the rascal. But for me he now would be under the sod."

"Young Hannaford is a lawyer, isn't he?"

"He's studying law. He has not been admitted to the bar."

"He must be in wrong, for fair, if he has been arrested for this murder."

"If such it is," Nick remarked.

"Whatever it is," Patsy insisted, "there must be some very strong evidence against him, or Captain Kane wouldn't have taken him into camp."

"Probably not."

"The cap isn't the kind that goes over the traces."

"Very true. We soon shall get all of the known facts, however, and until then there's nothing to be derived from speculation. Young Hannaford's home is less than a mile from the Ellery place. I judge from the familiarity with which he spoke of her, that he is well acquainted with Miss Ellery. We'll wait and see what he can tell us."

It was half-past ten when they arrived in that attractive part of Mount Vernon in which the Ellery estate was located. It was in a broad avenue overarched with numerous fine old trees, rich with the foliage of early summer; a quiet and secluded section having all the signs of opulence and aristocracy, and upon which the spreading town had not yet seriously encroached.

A broad gravel driveway led into the spacious grounds, where the dwelling nestled half hidden amid the trees of an extensive park. A tall granite post flanked each side of the driveway gate, grim sentinels for more than two centuries. A policeman was leaning against one of them, stationed there to prevent nearly a score of inquisitive people, who had heard of the crime, from entering the grounds.

As Danny swerved from the avenue, however, Nick nodded significantly to the officer, at the same time displaying the edge of his detective's badge, and the car was not detained. It sped up the long sweep of driveway and brought up at the steps of a broad veranda, flanking the front and one side of the house.

The car no sooner had come to a stop than two men emerged from a side door and hastened to greet the detective, as he sprang out and mounted the veranda steps.

One was Captain Kane, a dark, rugged man of nearly sixty, with a type of countenance evincing less culture and acumen than decisiveness, courage, and bulldog pertinacity.

His companion was Stanley Hannaford, a tall, handsome fellow in the twenties, as erect as an arrow and set up like an athlete. Though exceedingly pale and anxious, there was a look of relief in his eyes when he saw the detective, whom he no sooner had greeted than he plunged impetuously into a statement of the case, only to be quickly cut short by Captain Kane.

"You hold your horses, Hannaford," he said brusquely. "I'll first do the talking with Mr. Carter. After I've had my say, you may have yours, so be it he cares to hear you. Come with me, Nick. You, Hannaford, hike back into the house where Coyle can keep an eye on you. As smooth-spoken men as you have attempted to give leg bail, when half a chance presented itself. Don't you try it, Hannaford, not on your life."

Stanley Hannaford frowned resentfully, but made no reply. He turned sharp on his heel and entered the house.

Captain Kane folowed him as far as the side door, where he stopped and turned to the detective.

Nick signed for Patsy Garvan to join them.

CHAPTER II.

ON A STILL HUNT.

"Before we go in, Nick, I'll give you a hint at what has come off here and why I've arrested that fellow," said Captain Kane, gravely confronting the detective. "It will put you wise to the sort of case you're up against."

"Very well," said Nick. "Cut loose."

"Miss Ellery, who lives here, is worth a barrel of money, and is mysteriously missing. That, to me, is the most remarkable feature of the case. She hasn't been seen, so far as I have been able to learn, since about three o'clock yesterday afternoon. A neighbor then saw her heading toward the railway station."

"Did she have any luggage?"

"No. That was the first question asked by Coyle, one of my men, who got this information for me. Miss Ellery had only a small plush bag, such as women carry a handkerchief and pocketbook in. That leads me to think she was not going far, possibly only into the city, and that she may have returned later in the day or during the evening."

"Possibly."

"She employs only two servants in the house, a companion and the housekeeper. A man named Grady looks after the grounds, however, but he has a wife and family, and lives half a mile from here. He's a simple old fellow, and as square as a brick. There's no question about that. He was at work in the rear grounds, which butt on a narrow back street, until nearly eight o'clock last evening."

"Have you seen him this morning?"

"Yes. He's inside."

"Go on."

"Mrs. Penrod, the housekeeper, has been absent five days, to attend the funeral of a sister in Philadelphia. She returned this morning, arriving at the house about nine o'clock, only to find she could not get in. She had no key, nor could she raise anybody by ringing. She then went round to the back door, and finally to a French window opening into the library, hoping to see one of the women in that part of the house. She saw one, all right."

"Miss Ellery's companion?"

"Sure! She was lying dead on the library floor. Murdered, Nick, as sure as you're a foot high.

"Very much alarmed, she ran out to the street and called for help. It happened that Pat Coyle, whose beat is in this locality, was just passing the gate, and she called him in. Coyle came up to the house with her, and saw at once that a murder had been committed. He forced the French window and entered. Then he used the house telephone and notified me. I got here inside of ten minutes."

"Mrs. Penrod, I judge, knows nothing about the crime?" Nick remarked.

"Nothing whatever."

"Continue."

"I at once began an investigation," Captain Kane proceeded; "but had hardly set to work when Coyle discovered a man approaching the house."

"Hannaford?"

"Yes, as Mrs. Penrod hastened to inform me. I saw at once that he was quite pale and agitated. He was looking up at the front chamber windows when he came up the driveway, and we laid low to watch him. He did not go to the front door, nor ring any bell. Instead, he came around to the French window, which then was partly open, and entered the library. He did not see the body of the murdered woman until he stepped into the room, and then he turned as white as his shirt front and started to bolt. I nailed him before he could reach the window, however, and then he wilted like a wet rag."

"What did he say about the crime?" Nick asked

"Nothing just then," Captain Kane replied. "He appeared dazed, knocked out completely. Before he pulled himself together, Grady, who had just arrived to begin his day's work, came running toward the window. He had seen Hannaford enter, and also saw me hold him up."

"He had something to say, I infer?"

"Well, rather! I was wise to that, Nick, the moment he saw the body."

"What has he stated?"

"It appears that he saw Hannaford leave the library just before dark last evening and run for all he was worth. He went across the rear grounds and back of the stable, and that was the last Grady saw of him. The simpleton, thinking, then, that Hannaford might be in a hurry to catch a train, did not take the trouble to look into the matter. For that reason the crime was not discovered until this morning."

"Did Hannaford leave through the French window?"

"Yes."

"Has he made any explanation?"

"Such as it is," said Captain Kane significantly. "He says he called here to see Miss Ellery about seven o'clock last evening. She was not at home, and he waited nearly an hour, spending the time in conversation with Miss Bailey, the murdered woman. He claims that she was all right when he left her, but explains his hurried departure by saying that he thought he saw a trespasser in the rear grounds, and went out in pursuit of him. I cannot swallow that, however, for Grady saw only Hannaford, whose flight was not like that of a man in pursuit of another."

"That is Grady's opinion?"

"Yes."

"Anything more, Jim?"

"Very little. I arrested Hannaford, but gave him permission to appeal to you. He informed me that

you would come out at once, and that you wanted nothing disturbed. So I let things stand just as I found them. The body——"

"Stop a moment," said Nick. "I'll go in and view it for myself."

Captain Kane led the way through a side door opening on the veranda.

Hannaford was seated in the main hall of the handsomely furnished house. Near by sat a corpulent, middle-aged woman still in street attire. Her fleshy, maternal countenance was a sufficient voucher to her good character. Grady, an elderly, round-shouldered man in a blue blouse and overalls, together with Patrick Coyle, the policeman, were standing near the open door of the library.

Nick bestowed merely a glance upon each of them while he accompanied Captain Kane to the room, closely followed by Patsy Garvan.

The scene in the library appeared to confirm much that had been stated. On the floor near a fireplace lay the body of a woman about twenty-five years of age, of dark complexion, black hair and brows, and rather clean-cut, regular features—a face that in life must have been very attractive.

It then was drawn and distorted, however, with the pallor of death settled upon it. Rigor mortis had set in, and the woman's body was stiff and cold. Plainly enough, she had been dead for several hours.

She was lying on her back, with her head somewhat awry and her arms extended. She was clad in a blue serge skirt and a white waist. The waist was flecked with blood. The lace collar was torn out of place, exposing her neck and throat, on which there were several scratches and dark spots, apparently caused by the grip of a brutal hand. Her chin, also, was scratched and stained with blood.

Thrust into the woman's mouth and well down her throat, convincing evidence that a murder had, indeed, been committed, was an ordinary linen handkerchief, only a single corner of which protruded from between her drawn, gray lips.

"Strangled, brutally strangled—there's nothing else to it," said Captain Kane, after grimly watching Nick Carter's face for a few moments.

Nick did not reply immediately. He gazed down at the woman's disordered garments. A rug on which she was lying was wrinkled and awry, as if displaced during a struggle with her assailant. A chair near her feet was overturned, and was lying on its side on the floor.

"There appears to be nothing else to it, Jim, I'll admit," said Nick, at length.

"Nothing else is right, chief," put in Patsy. "It's dead open and shut."

"Coyle was the first to enter the room, Jim?"

"Yes."

"Tell him to come in here. I wish to question him."

Coyle came in a moment, while Captain Kane stepped to the open door to keep an eye on Hannaford.

"You forced this French window, Coyle, I understand," said Nick.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you quite sure it was locked?"

"I am, sir. I had all I could do to pry it open."

"Were the inner blinds drawn down?"

"No, sir. Both were raised, just as you see them."

"And this overturned chair?"

"It hasn't been touched. Nothing has been disturbed, Mr. Carter, that would cut any ice as evidence."

"That's all, Coyle," nodded Nick, and the policeman returned to the hall.

Captain Kane entered again, eying Nick curiously, but the detective made no comments. Instead, he crouched beside the body, taking one of the woman's hands to examine some stains of blood on the fingers. One of them, the forefinger on her right hand, was slightly cut, back of the nail, and Captain Kane drew nearer and said confidently:

"She got that while fighting her assailant."

"So it appears," Nick replied.

"He threw her to the floor and forced the handkerchief down her throat, holding her by the neck until she strangled. Here's marks left by his fingers. Nothing else could have caused them. He scratched her chin, too, while getting a grip on her neck. There's nothing else to it."

"I guess you're right," said Nick carelessly.

"The rug was twisted and the chair upset during the struggle. It occurred in the early evening, for no light was found burning, and we know it was just about dusk when Hannaford fled from the room."

"Hasn't it occurred to you, Jim, that some other person might afterward have entered and killed this woman?" Nick asked quietly.

"Yes; but there's nothing in that," Captain Kane quickly protested. "How, in that case, are we to account for Hannaford's conduct, his visit this morning,

and the look I saw on his face? No, no, Nick; that fellow's in it deep, take my word for it."

"I'll question him a little later," said Nick. "Look around outside, Patsy, and see if you can find any footprints in the lawn, or any evidence bearing on the case."

Patsy nodded, and hastened out through the French window—and Captain Kane, evidently bent upon losing sight of nothing, quickly arose and followed him.

This was precisely what Nick had anticipated and had aimed to bring about. He wanted a few moments alone with the dead, when the eyes of the local chief were not watching him. There was a brighter gleam in his own, a more intent expression, a light seen only when his peerless detective instinct was sharply stirred.

Moving more quickly, Nick drew the handkerchief out of the woman's mouth and carefully examined it. It was made of quite fine linen, but without embroidery or any lace edge, and was of a size usually carried by women. It was much wrinkled and covered with froth, from having been forced deep into the woman's throat. Nick examined it thoroughly, nevertheless, and found that it bore no mark, name, or initial. He wrapped it in a scrap of paper and slipped it into his pocket.

As he did so, Nick detected a peculiar odor that came from it, evidently a perfume of some kind. It was, however, totally unlike any with which he was familiar. It was an odd and somewhat pungent odor, yet it was hardly perceptible unless the handkerchief was held near his face. Crouching abruptly after brief thought, he brought his nose nearly to the woman's parted lips, sniffing intently for a moment.

"It's nothing she had been drinking," he muttered. "If imparted to the handkerchief by anything taken into her stomach, I could easily detect it. It must be something on the handkerchief itself."

Reverting to the woman's hand, Nick again examined the cut in her finger, which he briefly studied through a powerful lens which he had in his pocket. Taking out his knife, he drew the point of the blade under the nail of the forefinger, then examined with his lens the dark, clotted substance adhering to the tip of the blade. The lens revealed nothing definite, however, and he wiped the blade on a small piece of white paper, which he folded carefully and inclosed in his notebook.

Rising, after completing this investigation, Nick gazed for several moments at the white, upturned face. He felt sure he had seen it before, that the woman was not a total stranger to him, but he tried in vain to recall when and where they had met.

"Nora Bailey," he mused, still gazing. "I don't remember the name, yet I'll swear I've seen the woman. Was it so long ago and our meeting so insignificant, or has death so changed her as to preclude identification. I'll see what the housekeeper can tell me."

Nick stepped to the door and beckoned her into the room, which she entered somewhat gingerly, appearing awed and embarrassed.

"Don't be disturbed, Mrs. Penrod," said Nick, observing her feelings. "We shall, I am very sure, get at the truth of this affair. What can you tell me about this woman?"

"Why, sir, nothing at all, except that she has been living here as Miss Ellery's companion," said Mrs. Penrod, clearing her throat.

"How long has she been here?"

"About five months, sir, as I remember."

"Was she a friend, or acquaintance, of Miss Ellery?"

"No, sir; she came here a stranger. Miss Ellery's former maid and companion got married, and the mistress advertised for another. Miss Bailey applied and was accepted."

"Did she have any recommendations?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Do you know where she came from, or anything about her?"

"I don't, sir."

"Has she been in the habit of receiving callers, or mail?"

"Neither, sir. She has been very quiet and domestic like, the same as the mistress herself. I've never taken in any mail for her, nor admitted any one to see her."

"Where is her sleeping room, Mrs. Penrod?"

"Right over this one, sir, and back of Miss Ellery's chamber."

"That's all for the present."

Nick cut short his inquiries. He saw Patsy returning, and the latter entered a moment later, closely followed by Captain Kane.

"Nothing doing, chief," he announced. "I've covered the ground thoroughly."

"All the necessary evidence is right here, Carter," Captain Kane forcibly insisted, obviously with augmented confidence. "Get the truth out of Hannaford,

and you'll get the whole truth. I'll wager my pile on that."

"Be patient a little longer, Jim," Nick replied. "I'll question Hannaford at once."

CHAPTER III.

THE ANTIQUE VIAL

Nick Carter questioned Hannaford privately, in the parlor.

"You have appealed to me for aid, young man," he began impressively. "I want you to understand one thing, Hannaford, to start with: Only on one condition will I comply with your request."

"What condition, Mr. Carter?"

"That you tell me the whole truth, in so far as you know it."

"I am more than willing to do that," Hannaford eagerly answered. "The truth can't harm me, Mr. Carter. I'm absolutely innocent of the killing of Nora Bailey."

"What can you tell me about her, or about Miss Ellery?"

"I am in love with Doris Ellery. Though no announcement has been made, we are engaged to be married."

"Well, well, I congratulate you," said Nick. "How long since?"

"About three months. I have been a frequent visitor here for nearly a year."

"Did Miss Ellery expect you last evening?"

"Yes. That's why I am so terribly anxious and mystified by her absence. It's not like her to leave home in this way."

"She has said nothing to you that might explain her departure?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You saw Nora Bailey last evening?"

"Yes. I talked with her for nearly an hour in the library, while waiting for Miss Ellery to return."

"Do you know anything about her?"

"Only that Doris employed her as a maid and a companion several months ago. She came here in response to an advertisement, stating that she was an English girl who had recently come to this country. Though she had no recommendations, Doris was so favorably impressed with her that she engaged her."

"Has she since said anything about herself?"

"Not that I know of."

"What about her temperament and conduct?"

"Both have been exemplary, so far as I am informed. She was a quiet, agreeable girl, who very seldom went out unless in company with Miss Ellery, who really has become quite fond of her. I know of only one thing that may have a bearing on the crime. I mentioned it to Captain Kane, but he takes no stock in it. He appears to have made up his mind that I am guilty."

"To what do you refer?" Nick inquired.

"To what Nora said last evening," Hannaford proceeded to explain. "She appeared quite nervous over being alone here, and I asked her whether she felt timid. She replied that any woman would feel timid who lived with the 'sword of Damocles' suspended above her head."

"Well, well, that was significant, indeed," said Nick. "Did she make any explanation?"

"Naturally, Mr. Carter, I asked her what she meant. She replied that there was one man of whom she lived in constant fear."

"Did she mention his name?"

"No. She appeared averse to going into details, but said she seldom went out for fear of meeting the man, or being seen by him, and that she really regarded this house as her only safe refuge."

"Anything more?"

"She added that she lately had felt more nervous because of having twice seen a strange man on the back street, and once in the rear grounds, whose looks and actions seemed to indicate that he was a spy, and had some motive for watching this house."

"She said he was a stranger, eh?"

"Yes. She described him as a stocky, bearded, ill-clad fellow, bearing no resemblance to the man she feared."

"He was in disguise, perhaps."

"Be that as it may, no more was said on the subject. For Miss Bailey, who was seated near the French window, uttered a low scream at that moment and declared that she saw the same man just passing the corner of the stable. It then was about twilight, and I thought she must be mistaken, but she appeared so nervous and alarmed that I determined to look into the matter."

"I see," Nick nodded.

"I grabbed my hat and rushed out and across the grounds, passing back of the stable and into the rear street. I saw a fellow turning a corner some distance away, and I went in pursuit of him. He had disappeared when I reached the corner. I spent some lit-

tle time in vainly searching for him, and it then had become quite dark."

"About what time was it?"

"It was after eight, so late that I decided not to return. Instead, I stepped into a drug store and telephoned to Miss Bailey, telling her that she was mistaken, and not to feel nervous, also that I would call her up after reaching home, which is about a mile from here."

"Did you do so?"

"I did so about nine o'clock, Mr. Carter, but could get no answer. I tried again at eleven, just before going to bed, but with the same result. I passed a sleepless and nervous night myself, in fact, and tried the telephone again this morning. Failing to raise anybody, I left home as early as I could conveniently get away, and came directly here."

"You knew nothing of what had occurred?"

"Absolutely nothing," Hannaford earnestly asserted. "Naturally, however, I was much alarmed and very anxious. I could not account for the circumstances, nor could I really believe that a terrible crime had been committed."

"I understand."

"As I came up the driveway I saw that the window curtains in Miss Ellery's chamber were in exactly the same position as when I approached last evening, which convinced me that they had not been disturbed and that she had been away overnight. Instead of ringing, I headed for the side door, and then saw that the French window of the library was partly open. I hastened to enter, and then saw Miss Bailey's body lying on the floor."

"Captain Kane said you then attempted to bolt."

"Nonsense!" Hannaford quickly protested. "I only obeyed my first impulse, which was to rush out after help. I had no thought of flight, no occasion to flee. Captain Kane sprang from behind a door and seized me. I admit that I was much overcome, but only because of the terrible discovery I had made and my anxiety concerning Doris. I undertook to explain, but Grady entered just then and told his story, and that settled it. Captain Kane at once put me under arrest—and here I am."

"Captain Kane is a man of impulses," Nick said, a bit dryly. "You have no idea, I suppose, where Doris Ellery can be found."

"Not the slightest—would to God I had!" Hannaford fervently exclaimed.

"Do you know of anybody having designs upon her?"

"No."

"Have you had a rival in her affections?"

"I think not. That is to say, unless——"

"Unless what?" questioned Nick, when Hannaford hesitated. "Don't try to hide anything."

"No, no, Mr. Carter, not for the world. I know of only one man—Matt Gregory."

"The lawyer?"

"Yes. He was the executor of her father's will. I have reason to suspect that he has become very fond of her."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because he came here very frequently while settling the estate, and he since has called fully as often as propriety permits. I am sure, however, that Doris has never given him any encouragement."

"Do you know that she has done the contrary?" Nick asked pointedly. "Has he ever proposed to her and been rejected?"

"I do not think so, though it is not impossible. If so, Doris never mentioned it to me."

"Are you on friendly terms with Gregory?"

"For all I know. I have only a speaking acquaintance with him."

"I think that is all, Hannaford, at present."

Nick turned toward the door, but the young man hastened to seize him by the arm.

"For Heaven's sake, Carter, give me one word of encouragement," he pleaded, with cheeks gone white and lips quivering. "You've not looked into the case for nothing. You must have formed an opinion—some opinion. I entreat you to say something encouraging, if only a word."

There was a curious gleam in the kindly eyes of the great detective. He lowered his voice, saying gravely:

"Will it afford you any comfort to be told that I believe you?"

"Yes."

"You have my word for it, then."

"Thank God for that!"

"I want you to follow my instructions, however, to the letter," Nick added.

"I will do so."

"You must not repeat the opinion I have just expressed. Much may depend upon it, for, unless I am egregiously mistaken, there is a black bit of knavery going on here."

"I will disclose nothing, Carter, I promise you."

"Under no circumstances, mind you."

"Never, sir, without your permission."

"I have only one reason for impressing this upon you."

"Namely?"

"Because Kane has placed you under arrest and will probably hold you in custody. I may decide not to interfere. It may serve my purpose to let you be suspected, for a time. In that case, even if you are locked up and held without bail, remember constantly that—mum's the word."

"I'll not forget," Hannaford assured him. "Nor will I kick against being locked up, Mr. Carter, despite the pain and humiliation, if you can derive any advantage from it."

"Good on your head," said Nick approvingly. "Your pluck shall be rewarded. Whatever comes off, then, rest assured that I am at work on the case, and that I will leave no stone unturned to find Miss Ellery, solve this mystery, and put bracelets on the guilty. Take my word for it, Hannaford, and prepare to face the music."

"That's good enough for me, Mr. Carter," said Hannaford, warmly pressing the detective's hand. "With God and you on my side, I can laugh at misfortune, or defy a legion of foes. I give the case to you unreservedly."

"I will not fail you," Nick said simply, as he led the way from the room.

Was it a rash promise?

Was the case less deep and dark than superficially appeared?

Was Captain Kane right and Stanley Hannaford a liar? Was the young man's story a falsehood out of whole cloth, the alleged statements of Nora Bailey only lies, the stocky spy only a myth, and Hannaford guilty, for some unknown reason, of killing Doris Ellery's hired companion? Were there relations between them which required her death, that he might wed the heiress he loved?

On the other hand, assuming that theory to be wrong, could it be that Nora Bailey was the victim of her mistress; that Doris Ellery had returned the previous night and committed the crime; that it was her handkerchief found in the mouth of the murdered woman, and that her absence was only a subterfuge for averting suspicion?

Were there relations between the two women that had made the death of one imperative to the happiness of the other? Did not the circumstances warrant such a theory?

Setting this aside, also, was the criminal the unknown spy? Was he the man feared by Nora Bailey? Did he enter after Hannaford's departure and throttle her to death, leaving no trace or clew behind him? If so, who was he? whence came he? where was he to be found?

In view of all of these contingencies, to say nothing of possibilities much more remote, one might reasonably fear that Nick Carter had, indeed, made a rash promise in those simple words to the man relying upon his aid and genius:

"I will not fail you."

Having given the promise, however, Nick was not long in making his next move in the case. He saw that the hall then was deserted. From the library came the sound of unfamiliar voices. Nick signed for Hannaford to go and rejoin the two policemen, at the same time saying quietly:

"Tell them I'm looking around for further evidence."

Hannaford nodded and walked away.

Nick mounted the hall stairs, four at a stride, and entered the chamber over the library—that of the murdered woman.

His search was brief, though thorough, and not without results. To begin with, he found in a bureau drawer several linen handkerchiefs precisely like that with which Nora Bailey had been strangled.

Tucked under them in a corner of the drawer was a slender, antique vial, made of thick, figured glass embossed with gilt, and having a glass stopper. It comained a small quantity of colorless liquid, which Nick found, upon examination, was extremely volatile, and that it had the same peculiar, penetrating odor detected on Nora's handkerchief. Smelling of it for several moments in an attempt to determine the aroma, Nick discovered that it had a peculiar effect upon him. It was to be compared only with that caused by inhaling a little ether, or chloroform, yet it was entirely unlike either.

"By Jove, that's odd," he muttered, replacing the stopper. "I never smelled anything just like it. It makes one fairly dizzy to inhale it persistently. Where did Nora Bailey get it, and this vial? It's very antique, ages old, and—humph! I'll make a bid, and find out."

Nick abruptly slipped the vial into his pocket and continued his search. He soon found that none of Nora's garments were marked, that there were no letters, papers, nor anything of the kind to show who she really was and where she had come from.

"She has guarded herself against exposure," thought Nick. "Precautions have been taken to hide

her identity. She applied for her situation here with some ulterior object in view. These garments are of domestic make and material. She's not an English girl, nor is her name Nora Bailey. I'll wager my pile on that."

There remained only a closet unsearched, the door of which Nick opened while thinking the foregoing. It contained a few other garments and a trunk of moderate size, somewhat defaced by usage. It was not locked. It contained only a few pieces of linen underwear. They were as indefinite as those already examined.

Nick looked at each end of the trunk in the hope of finding an express tag or label. There was neither, but on one end two initials evidently had been effaced and rudely obliterated with a knife. Nick turned the trunk so that the light fell full on that end, and after a few moments was able to decipher the two initials.

"L. L.," he muttered, replacing the trunk and closing the closet door. "Unless the trunk was a borrowed one, or a second-hand one, those were the woman's initials. The odds are in favor of its having been her own, however, and I'll bank on that probability. L. L.—where have I met a woman with those initials and a face like hers? Somewhere, I'm sure. It will come to me sooner or later. I'll not rest till I recall it."

Nick felt positive on this point, that he had seen the woman before, that her true name and history were stored away in one of the chambers of his brain, out of which he should finally rake it—vast storehouse of such material though it was.

Leaving nothing to betray his visit to Nora's chamber, Nick returned to the library. As he approached the open door, after an absence of hardly ten minutes, he heard the same unfamiliar voice that had reached his ears when he was departing from Hannaford. He paused briefly in the hall and listened.

"No, no, Captain Kane, it cannot be reasonably doubted. The body presents conditions that are entirely reliable. The woman has been dead fifteen hours at least, and probably a little longer."

"You are sure of the fifteen hours, doctor?"

"Absolutely sure. I would stake my medical reputation on it."

"Fifteen hours," said Captain Kane, while Nick continued to listen. "It now is eleven o'clock. Reckoning back fifteen hours would bring it to eight o'clock last evening—or, as Doctor Devereau asserts, probably a little earlier. What have you to say to that, Mr. Hannaford?"

"I have nothing to say," replied Hannaford doggedly.

"No wonder! You already have said too much, and I now would advise you to keep quiet and employ counsel. You left this house just before eight, the very hour when, according to Doctor Devereau and Professor Jaynes, this woman was murdered—or a little earlier. Either they are wrong, which is wholly improbable, or——"

"Oh, I don't deny that their statements seem to incriminate me," Hannaford interrupted, with bitter resentment. "I admit that I was here between seven and eight o'clock. As for you, captain, you appear determined to saddle this crime on my shoulders. Go ahead, then, and do your worst. I insist that I am innocent, and it's up to you to prove me guilty. That's all I have to say, sir, and you'll get no more out of me."

"That's a wise stand for you to take, and I'm glad to see you're coming to your senses," Captain Kane retorted bluntly. "Look after him, Coyle, and take him to the station. I shall require no more of you, Doctor Devereau. Much obliged to you and to Professor Jaynes. I now will notify the coroner, and ——" he broke off abruptly.

Nick Carter had entered the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEAD ALIVE?

Nick Carter's face betrayed none of his secret thoughts when he entered the library. He glanced gravely at the several persons present, a bit sharply at Doctor Devereau and a second stranger seated near the French window. Patsy Garvan occupied a chair near the body, and had had an eye on all that had transpired.

Captain Kane hastened to introduce the two strangers.

"Doctor Devereau, Mr. Carter," he said, with a wave of his hand. "This is a friend of his, Professor Jaynes, from Germany."

Nick smiled and bowed to both, responding agreeably to their greeting, but he did not extend his hand.

Doctor Devereau was a portly, imposing man, with a florid complexion, an abundance of reddish hair, a smoothly shaved face, and narrow, gray eyes. He was about fifty years old, and was a popular local physician.

His friend from Germany was a distinctly different type—a lithe, yet well-built man under fifty, with dark

eyes and bushy hair, a short beard parted down the middle, through which, when he smiled, gleamed a double row of sharp white teeth.

Nick viewed him without a change of countenance, though not without feelings of perplexity and amazement not easily concealed.

"Doctor Devereau is a prominent physician and lives in the next street," Captain Kane explained. "I called him in to view the body, hoping he could determine precisely when the woman was killed. He is positive on that point, that it was before eight o'clock last evening. That, Carter, fairly clinches my belief that——"

"That this young man knows a good deal more than he is willing to admit," Nick interposed, with an indifferent glance at Hannaford. "You may be right, Captain Kane, for all I can discover to the contrary."

"Nothing doing, eh?"

"No." Nick shook his head. "I don't find anything to refute your opinion. I took this handkerchief from the woman's mouth, thinking it might serve as a clew, in event of my looking deeper into the case. I now will turn it over to you."

"You're going to drop the matter, are you?"

"You have it so well in hand, Captain Kane, that I see no occasion to spend my time on it," Nick pointedly answered. "I'll follow it from the outside, Hannaford, however, and will do anything I can for you."

"I'm obliged to you, Mr. Carter," Hannaford said simply.

"You have no alternative at present but to yield to the police. You'd better retain a lawyer and let him look after your case."

"That's my advice, Nick," Captain Kane quickly coincided. "There's nothing else for him to do."

Nick appeared to be of the same opinion. He lingered for a time, talked briefly with Doctor Devereau, heard upon what the physician had based his opinion, and agreed with him, for the most part—if anything that Nick then said was to be taken at its face value.

It was nearly noon when the coroner arrived. No word had been received from Miss Ellery. Hannaford had been removed to the police station. Doctor Devereau and his friend from Germany had gone about their business. The case appeared to have taken a decidedly definite trend—and Nick Carter then departed with his assistant.

"Gee whiz!" Patsy quietly exclaimed, after they had entered their waiting car and were speeding homeward. "What have you got up your sleeve, chief?"

Nick smiled a bit oddly.

"Why do you think I have anything up my sleeve, Patsy?"

"That's a fat question."

"You must have some reason for thinking so."

"Sure I have! I know your eyes are as sharp as mine."

"What do you mean?"

"Come off your perch, chief! You know what I mean. I see it in your eyes. If that black-whiskered chap, the professor from Germany, isn't our old foe, Doctor David Lascar, the poisoner, I'll eat my hat, chief—crown, brim, and sweat leather!"

Nick laughed.

"I wondered whether you detected any resemblance," said he.

"You bet I did."

"Still, his disguise is a remarkably good one."

"It's all of that."

"Few could penetrate it."

"That's true."

"And Doctor Lascar is dead and buried. A prison physician certified to his death, and prison deputies delivered his body to one Doctor Devlin for dissection. How, then, can Professor Jaynes be Doctor David Lascar?"

Patsy gazed perplexedly at his chief for a moment, for Nick appeared to have spoken seriously.

"You tell me, chief."

"Well, one might explain it in this way," said Nick. "Devlin may have been an alias, and Devereau the man. By means of some of his infernal drugs or compounds, smuggled to him in prison, Lascar might gradually have brought upon himself a condition so nearly resembling death that it deceived the prison physician. In that case, his body was turned over to Devlin. If Devlin was Devereau, he probably had antidotes for the drug, as well as previous arrangements with Lascar, and now we find the latter with him in the character of Professor Jaynes. That is to say, Patsy, if the theory is correct."

"You think it's correct, don't you?"

"I see points of resemblance between Lascar and this alleged professor."

"Why didn't you question him, or arrest him?"

"We might be wrong, or unable to prove it. Lascar was a bold and crafty fellow. Who would believe that Professor Jaynes, if he has his assumption well backed up, is a dead man?"

"Was that your reason, chief? I'll be hanged if I think so!"

"Besides," Nick went on quizzically, "it might be to

our advantage not to show our hand so early in the game. The knavery committed in that house, the killing of Nora Bailey, the disappearance of Doris Ellery, the incrimination of young Hannaford—all is so like some of Lascar's devilish work, that this visit of Professor Jaynes on the scene so quickly seems to identify him as the former rascal."

"I believe your story."

"I'm going to dig out the whole truth in this affair," Nick added. "I might throw a shoe, however, if I were to arrest Professor Jaynes. If, on the other hand, I can corner and identify him as David Lascar, I shall clinch the whole business."

"Gee! now you're talking," said Patsy, quick to see all of the points. "That's more like it, chief, and I'm with you."

"You'll not remain long with me, however," laughed Nick, signing for Danny to stop the car. "Have you a disguise in your pocket?"

"Yes, sure," Patsy nodded. "Four or five, chief."

"Slip into one, then, and go back there," Nick directed. "I want you to trace Miss Ellery. Get next to Mrs. Penrod on the quiet and confide who you are and what you require. Bind her to secrecy; I'm very sure she may be trusted. Find out from her which of Miss Ellery's street suits is missing from her wardrobe closet. You'll know, then, how she was clad."

"Sure thing. I'll get wise to that."

"Also get from Mrs. Penrod a recent photograph of Miss Ellery. It may be of some help to you, and I have a use for it a little later."

"I'll get one, chief."

"Then start out on the woman's track, Patsy, and report to me this evening. You'll find me at home, and I may have something to tell you about the case. Take no other steps without consulting me."

There was no need for more explicit instructions. Nick knew his assistant, and Patsy knew his business. The one sped homeward, while the other turned about face to foot it back to the Ellery mansion.

It was six o'clock when Patsy arrived home. He found Nick and Chick in the business office, the latter having been informed of all of the details of the case. Patsy hung up his hat, then gave Nick a cabinet photograph, remarking glibly:

"There you are, chief. One of the latest, taken only a month ago. She's a peach, for fair, if she looks like that."

Nick gazed briefly at the photograph, an excellent likeness of Doris Ellery. It was a sweet, womanly face, indicative of a refined, lovable nature and lofty character, a firm will and broad intelligence. Laying it aside for a moment, Nick turned to his assistant, saying tersely:

"Well, what luck?"

"Pretty fair, chief," replied Patsy, drawing up a chair. "I went back to the Ellery place, as you directed, and had no trouble in getting a secret interview with Mrs. Penrod. I made myself known, and told her what I wanted. She's all right, chief, for fair. She promised to keep her mouth closed, and said she'd turn heaven and earth to help find her mistress. She got the photograph for me, and also found out what dress Miss Ellery must have worn. It was a stylish street costume of navy blue."

"I thought you'd find Mrs. Penrod very willing," Nick remarked. "What was your next move?"

"I made a bee line to the railway station toward which Miss Ellery was said to have been going."

"Did you get track of her?"

"Yes. The station agent, who knows her by sight, said she had taken the three o'clock train into town. It is one she quite frequently takes, I was told, so I boarded it myself and took a chance that the conductor would remember having seen her the previous day."

"You were right?"

"Right as a trivet," nodded Patsy. "I questioned him when he came after my ticket. His name is Schultz. He is personally acquainted with Miss Ellery, and he not only remembered seeing her, but stated that she was reading a single sheet from one of the New York newspapers. He noticed it, chief, only because she did not have the rest of the paper."

"Could he tell you what paper and sheet it was?"

"That's what," laughed Patsy. "He was so curious that he went and got the sheet after Miss Ellery left the train, for he had noticed that she had laid it aside on the seat, after having cut out a small card from the column of professional ads. He was partly led to do so because she appeared a little nervous."

"Could he tell you anything more?"

"Better than that, chief."

"How so?"

"He still had the sheet of the newspaper in his locker in the baggage car, and he went and got it for me."

"Good for Schultz," said Nick. "You then went and consulted a file of the newspapers."

"Sure thing," said Patsy. "I easily found the card cut out by Miss Ellery, which was that of a fortune teller and a card reader who has quarters in Thirty-

second Street. She poses as a clairvoyant, too, and it's a cinch that there is where Miss Ellery was going."

"No doubt," Nick admitted. "What's the fortune teller's name?"

"She is known as Madame Marvelli."

"H'm, I've heard of her. Did you go to her rooms?"

"No." Patsy quickly shook his head. "I thought I might queer things, chief, if I butted in ahead of you, in case anything happened to Miss Ellery while she was in Madame Marvelli's joint. I decided I'd report to you before taking any further steps."

"Quite right," Nick said approvingly. "A call by Miss Ellery on such a woman must have some significance. I'll think it over until morning and see what I can make of it."

CHAPTER V.

A CAT IN A FIT.

The newspapers had it all the following morning—or had what Captain Jim Kane had given them. The murder of Nora Bailey, the mysterious absence of wealthy Miss Ellery, the arrest of Stanley Hannaford upon almost conclusive evidence—all appeared under glaring display lines and with sensational details.

The name of Nick Carter was hardly mentioned, however, for Hannaford had proved loyal to his promise and said nothing. The most important factor in the case, therefore, and by far the strongest, was keeping in the background.

Nevertheless, when Chick and Patsy came down to the business office, they found Nick seated at a table with a look of profound satisfaction in his sparkling eyes. Spread open before him was a huge book, containing innumerable newspaper clippings, personal pictures, and the like, covering a period of nearly a dozen years. Each was carefully indexed and all pertained to criminal cases in which he had personally figured, or foreseen might some day be of use to him.

"Ah, you enter just as I find it!" he exclaimed, looking up. "I've been searching for it since daylight."

"For what?" Chick eagerly asked.

"A clipping I felt sure was here, but could not tell how it was indexed. I knew I had seen her."

"Nora Bailey?"

"Yes, though that is not her name. I now recall her distinctly. I saw her in the criminal court when the case was tried. That was seven years ago, however, and as I saw her only once, it's no wonder I did not readily identify her."

"The wonder is, Nick, that you remember her at all," Chick declared. "You're a marvel in that respect, as well as others. Who is the woman?"

"You'll remember the case," Nick replied, glancing at the clipping. "On the afternoon of Saturday, April third, seven years ago, Thomas Farley, a clerk in the employ of the Waterford Trust Company, on Broadway, walked out of the bank with seventy thousand dollars in cash."

"You're right; I do remember."

"The theft was not discovered until the following Monday. For ten days Farley eluded the police by living in a flat rented by one Lizzie Lowney, a girl of the Tenderloin, with whom he was infatuated. Impelled by a reward of a thousand dollars then offered, or by a fear that she might finally be caught and arrested, she betrayed her recreant lover and turned him over to the police."

"Yes, yes, I remember all about it."

"Farley was convicted, and given six years in the State prison. He has served the sentence, and was discharged about five months ago. Here are pictures of Farley and the girl."

"By gracious, that's the woman, all right," cried Patsy, gazing over Nick's shoulder. "She looked older yesterday, and death had changed her, but that's the woman, chief."

"It is further confirmed by the initials on her trunk, to say nothing of other circumstances."

"You think Farley is the man she feared?"

"Undoubtedly. He was liberated five months ago, just about the time that Lizzie Lowney, as we now will call her, answered Miss Ellery's advertisement, and secured the coveted situation. She probably had spent her thousand dollars and was on her uppers. She knew Farley was to be discharged from prison, that he might seek to avenge himself for her betrayal, and she took these means to elude him. She succeeded in imposing upon Miss Ellery, and has been lying low ever since."

"She's lying low now, all right," said Patsy sententiously.

"Do you think Farley killed her?" Chick inquired.

"I think Farley must have had a hand in this whole job," Nick replied. "Three very probable facts point to it."

"Namely?"

"Farley was in the same prison with Dave Lascar," Nick proceeded to explain. "In all probability they

became acquainted, and stealthily framed up this job, to be pulled off as soon as both were free. Farley's counsel at the time of his trial, moreover, was none other than the criminal lawyer, Matt Gregory, who is said to be passionately fond of Miss Ellery. These circumstances are too significant to be ignored. They link the three men so closely together that, in view of all of the facts, I'm convinced that they form the ring of rascals responsible for the whole job."

"Including Doctor Devereau?"

"Exactly. In other words, Lascar's friend and confederate, Doctor Devlin."

"Who resuscitated him, instead of dissecting him."

"Precisely."

"By Jove! Nick, I guess you're right," Chick declared. "You've done great work in nailing these points so quickly."

"There are more to be nailed, Chick, and other work to be done," said Nick. "Some of it may prove to be desperate work. We're up against a bad gang."

"That's no pipe dream," put in Patsy.

"It's a thousand to one that they have abducted Doris Ellery, with designs upon her fortune, her lover, and herself. Matt Gregory, take my word for it, is back of that part of the job."

"And Lascar after the coin."

"That's about the size of it."

"While Farley had it in for his betrayer."

"We'll get at the whole business a little later," said Nick. "While I am digging deeper into the case, Chick, you get after Farley. Find out where he is, what he's doing, and where he was at the time of the crime. See whether or not he can set up an alibi."

"I'll have those points down pat before night," Chick asserted confidently.

"In the meantime, Patsy, you tackle Gregory along the same lines," Nick added. "Find out where he was night before last, and whether he and Farley have been seen together lately. By the time you report, I shall have wormed out other important facts. Don't expose your hands, mind you, without consulting me."

"What are your own plans?" asked Chick.

"I haven't decided," said Nick. "If I make any move of importance before you return, I'll leave word for you with Joseph."

It was nine o'clock when Chick and Patsy left home to begin the work assigned them.

Nick spent half an hour looking over his morning mail. Then, taking a powerful microscope from one of the wall cabinets, he stood it on a table in the bright light from the window.

Taking out his notebook, he found the scrap of paper in which he had inclosed the particles of clotted substance found under the fingernail of the dead woman. Carefully transferring it to a small glass plate, he slipped it under the lens of the microscope and for several minutes studied it intently. A rather grim and sinister smile lurked about his lips. Presently he carefully removed the plate and locked it in a drawer in his desk. He then replaced the microscope in the cabinet, just as Joseph, his man servant, entered the office.

"Ah!" Nick exclaimed, with an inquiring glance. "Got one?"

"Yes, sir," Joseph nodded. "It's a stray one, all right, as you directed. There'll be no kick coming."

"Good enough, Joseph. Bring her here."

Joseph withdrew and presently returned, carrying in his arms a scrawny, half-fed gray cat.

"Ah, just the critter, Joseph," Nick said approvingly. "A back-yard tabby. We may, perhaps, sacrifice her in the interests of justice, though it's quite probable that her traditional nine lives will pull her out of the fire. Place her on the table, Joseph, and hang onto her while I prepare her for the ordeal."

"Her claws are sharp, Mr. Carter," Joseph remarked, with a grimace. "Look out for them."

"As sharp as a serpent's tooth, no doubt. Through her, nevertheless, we may be able to uncover a human serpent whose fangs are sharper and more deadly than those of any reptile that crawls."

"Doctor David Lascar?"

"None other. Now, then, we're ready."

Nick had provided a small muzzle that could be easily and quickly adjusted to the cat's head. Upon a small piece of sponge he had poured a few drops of the liquid contained in the antique vial found in Nora Bailey's chamber. Putting the damp sponge into the muzzle, the latter was quickly slipped over the animal's head, forcing her to inhale the penetrating odor with each breath.

"Good enough, Joseph," said Nick. "She cannot claw off the muzzle. Place her on the floor."

Joseph obeyed.

"If my suspicions are correct," Nick added, "the odor from this decoction should act upon a cat a thousand times quicker than upon a human subject. We shall not have to wait long for its effects to be manifest."

"I guess you're right, Mr. Carter. She's got a wild glare in her eyes already."

Placed on the floor, the frightened cat was making

desperate efforts to scratch off the muzzle, shaking her head and darting with frequent frantic leaps from one corner of the room to another.

Nick sat down and watched her.

Joseph had an awed, apprehensive look in his eyes.

Ten minutes passed.

The cat, after repeated vain efforts to escape from the torture she was undergoing, suddenly bounded to the middle of the room. She stood for a moment, with every muscle quivering, with her hair on end, with her head thrust out and her eyes ablaze. Then, like a flash of light, she darted twice around the room, then out of the open door and into the hall, down a flight of back stairs and through a basement window, shivering the pane to atoms.

Nick uttered a shout, and followed her to the rear yard, with Joseph hot on his heels.

They found the tabby in a corner behind an ash barrel, with her head buried next to a post and her elongated body nearly as rigid as a poker.

Nick quickly removed the muzzle and left her lying there.

"Just as I anticipated," he announced, a bit grimly. "The infernal stuff, or the subtle gaseous fumes thrown off by it, threw the cat into a violent fit. I'm on the right track, Joseph, as sure as death and taxes."

"You think, Mr. Carter, that Lascar——"

"Never mind what I think just now, Joseph," Nick interrupted. "Come up to the office. I have some instructions to give you, and then I'll be off to have a word with Madame Viola Marvelli."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S RUSE.

It was after eleven o'clock when Nick Carter left home. He was carefully disguised, and he had in his pocket the photograph of Doris Ellery, also a handkerchief on which were a few drops of the potent fluid found in the antique vial.

Nick reasoned that if Doris had visited Madame Marvelli's apartments, which was as far as Patsy had been able to trace her, the fortune teller might know what had become of her, might even be in league with the knaves responsible for her disappearance. In event of the latter, Nick felt sure he could verify it by means of a simple ruse. Furthermore, if convinced of the fact, he thought he could force a confession from Madame Marvelli, and compel her to reveal Miss Ellery's whereabouts.

Nick arrived at the house in Thirty-second Street just before noon. It was in a commercial district, and each flat was used for business purposes. The second floor was occupied by a popular milliner, the third by a woman hairdresser and wigmaker, the upper one by a photographer.

There were painted wire screens in the lower windows. The curtains also were so closely drawn that a view of the room from the street was impossible. A rise of steps led into a vestibule, the inner door of which was ajar. Nick pushed it open and entered a narrow, dimly lighted corridor, at the farther end of which was an automatic elevator, with a small illuminated sign over the door.

On the door of Madame Marvelli's apartments was a brass plate bearing her name. Nick pressed the electric bell, which was answered almost immediately by a large, robust woman of forty, with strong, dark features, black hair and eyes, and an expression of rather sinister attraction. She had several glittering ornaments in her hair, and wore a loose, bright-figured garment resembling a kimono, giving her a somewhat fantastic appearance.

"Madame Marvelli?" said Nick politely.

"Yes, sir," she bowed, smiling. "Walk in."

Nick followed her through a narrow entry and into a strangely lighted front room, the door of which she closed. It struck him incidentally that there were two closed doors between the room and the public corridor, and that his interview with the woman could not possibly be overheard from that direction.

In the middle of the room, which was quite attractively furnished, was a table covered with a black cloth, on which two packs of cards were lying. Above it, for the drawn curtains and painted screens excluded most of the daylight, was a hanging lamp with a broad, green shade. It hung so low that most of the rays were shed directly down upon the table, while the rest of the room was pervaded with a greenish, somewhat uncanny light.

"A charlatan, if there ever was one, and very probably a jade who is out for the coin in any old way," thought Nick, as he sized up the surroundings.

"You have come to consult me," said Madame Marvelli, smiling and waving Nick to a chair at one side of the small square table. "You have lost a friend—a very dear friend, sir."

"How do you know that?" Nick inquired, as if surprised at her immediate appreciation of his mission.

Madame Marvelli smiled again, and seated herself at the opposite side of the table. She did not reply

for a few moments, but closed her eyes dreamily and inhaled a deep breath, then shook her broad shoulders and indulged in several convulsive muscular twitches of her arms and hands.

"I am a clairvoyant," she said, at length. "I know you have lost a friend. I sense why you have called on me. I get it from the unseen world, for I can commune with the dead, and——"

"Well, it happens this morning that I am in search of the living," Nick interposed, a bit dryly. "If you know as much of this world as you claim to know of the other, you may help me find my friend."

"Ah, you prefer to consult me through the cards," said Madame Marvelli, pretending to throw off her affected conditions. "Very many people select the cards, instead of——"

"Never mind the cards," Nick again interrupted, averse to any of her charlatanry. "We can dispense with them, as well as with spooks and spirits. What I want, madame, is information concerning a person who recently called on you."

"Dear me!" Madame Marvelli exclaimed, with a sharper scrutiny. "Hundreds of persons have recently called on me. To whom do you refer?"

"I have a photograph that may assist identification. You'll readily remember the face. It would impress any one, particularly one as impressionable as you."

Nick pretended to search his pockets for the photograph. Incidentally, while speaking, he drew out the handkerchief and laid it on the table, all the while with his gaze fixed on the woman's face. His ruse proved successful almost immediately.

Madame Marvelli's heavy brows knit closer. Her eyes took on a sharper gleam. She glanced involuntarily at the handkerchief, with the color slowly fading from her face, till it looked gray and ghastly in the uncanny light.

"She scents it, all right," thought Nick, watching her while he continued to feel in his pockets. "She recognizes the odor, and that alone proves her to be in league with the knaves I suspect."

By no other outward sign, however, was Madame Marvelli's secret perturbation betrayed. She gazed steadily at Nick for a few seconds, then drew up her imposing figure and broke the brief silence by asking coolly, with a firmness denoting her invincible nerve:

"Can't you find the photograph?"

"I thought I put it in my breast pocket," said Nick, with feigned annoyance. "I'm sure I took it from my——"

"While you are searching for it," Madame Marvelli put in, "I will remove my lunch from the gas stove in the next room. I fear it may burn. I'll return in a moment."

Nick made no objection. He had observed that the door of a rear room was ajar, and could faintly scent something cooking. Glancing furtively after her as she passed through the door, he caught sight of a gas stove and saw that there was no other person in the room.

Madame Marvelli left the door ajar.

Nick could hear her moving to and fro. He heard her place a pan on a bare table, and then the noise of a spoon used in stirring. This continued for two or three minutes, as if the woman had found it necessary to the preservation of her deferred lunch—but the door was too nearly closed for the detective to see her.

She stood at a table in one corner. Her eyes, then ablaze with malignant fire, were fixed upon the door, alert to detect the first sign that she was being watched. With one hand she stirred noisily with a spoon—in an empty pan.

In her other hand she held a portable telephone. Attached to the mouthpiece of it was an ingenious rubber device, a hood resembling that used by dentists when administering laughing gas, and which enabled her to talk into the instrument without being heard by a person even in the same room. Her communication was only a brief one—but there was a look of mingled satisfaction and relief in her eyes when she set down the instrument and turned to rejoin the detective.

"Pardon me for keeping you waiting," she said, as she resumed her seat. "This is usually my lunch hour."

"No apology is necessary," said Nick, who had replaced the handkerchief in his pocket.

"Ah, you have found the photograph."

"Yes." Nick passed it to her across the table. "Tell me what you know about the woman."

Madame Marvelli studied the picture in silence for several moments. She appeared to be thinking deeply, striving to recall when she had seen the face and under what circumstances.

"She's playing for time," thought Nick, steadily watching her. "She knows I'm here to question her, and she's shaping up her defense. I'll crumble it to its foundation before I'm done with her."

Madame Marvelli looked up from the picture and met, without flinching, the searching gaze of the detective.

"I don't know the woman," she coolly asserted.

"You've seen her, haven't you?"

"Very likely. I see so many women, however, that I could not possibly remember all of them. This woman is a stranger to me."

"She called here day before yesterday."

"Yes?"

"Not far from four o'clock."

"Let me think."

"She wore a stylish street suit of navy blue. She was alone, Madame Marvelli, and——"

"Ah, stop a moment," exclaimed the woman, brightening. "I remember the navy-blue costume. It was a very handsome one, and impressed me more than the wearer. That's like a woman, isn't it? I now recall her perfectly."

"I thought you would," Nick said shortly.

Madame Marvelli noticed his sinister dryness, but ignored it.

"It was, as you say, about four o'clock when she called here," she coolly admitted.

"What time did she leave?"

"She remained about half an hour. I seldom give a longer consultation."

"Consultation, eh? She came here, then, to consult you?"

"Certainly."

"About what?"

"She wanted me to tell her fortune. Many women call on me for that. It's a foible of the sex, that of wishing to know the future, what it has in store in the way of love, wealth, business prospects, or——"

"Or any other old thing," said Nick, interrupting. "Come, come, Madame Marvelli, cease these evasions and tell me the truth."

"The truth, sir!"

"Exactly. This woman did not consult you on any such matters. She already is wealthy. She has a lover and is engaged to be married. She is not interested in business, nor likely to be. Her mission, therefore, must have been something else. What was it?"

Nick's austerity, for he had spoken much more sternly, brought a darker frown to the woman's face. She tossed the photograph on the table, saying resentfully, with an impatient gesture:

"I know nothing about the woman."

"You know why she came here," Nick forcibly insisted.

"I already have told you."

"You have only evaded telling me. You know the woman, Madame Marvelli, and precisely why she came here."

"I can give you no further information."

"You mean that you will not."

"I mean just what I say."

"Then, since you persist in pretending ignorance, I will tell you something about her," Nick declared, taking a new tack. "Her name is Doris Ellery, in whose home in Mount Vernon a woman was murdered night before last."

"Ah, indeed? I have read about that in the newspapers."

"Miss Ellery is mysteriously missing, and I am trying to find her. She has been traced to this house, to these very rooms—but no farther."

"What do you imply by the last?" Madame Marvelli asked angrily. "You are insolent. I know nothing about Miss Ellery's disappearance."

"I am stating what I know, and you'll be wise if you do the same," Nick sharply retorted. "The murdered woman was known as Nora Bailey. When was she here to see you?"

"Who?"

"Nora Bailey."

"Never. I never heard of her."

"Oh, yes, you have," Nick insisted. "She has called to consult you, to learn whether she was in any immediate danger, whether a man of whom she stood in fear was likely to find her. Don't trouble yourself to deny it, Madame Marvelli. It's the truth; I can read it in your face."

"How happens it, knowing so much, that you do not know it all?" Madame Marvelli demanded, with a sneer.

"I know all I have stated," declared Nick, despite that he was shooting partly at random and aiming only to evoke a betrayal that would confirm all of his suspicions. "You told Nora Bailey something that she regarded of serious importance, something she afterward confided to Doris Ellery. The latter, in turn, came here to ask you about it. The circumstances admit of no other deduction. Nothing else would have impelled her to visit you."

"How do you know that?"

"Women of her character and mental caliber aren't looking to have their fortunes told."

"Is that so? You don't know what you're talking about."

"I know that at least."

"If you're so well informed, then, why do you trouble yourself to question me?"

"Because I am not content with part of the truth," Nick said sharply. "I want all of it."

"Why don't you tell the truth yourself, then?" Madame Marvelli came back at him, with eyes flashing. "Why have you come here in this underhand way? Why don't you state who you are and why you are interested in these people?"

"Would you like to know?"

"Yes."

"I will tell you."

"There's no need of it," snapped the woman. "I can guess."

"Indeed?"

"You are a detective."

"Don't be too sure of it. I am not——"

"You are!" Madame Marvelli passionately interrupted. "You cannot deceive me. You are in disguise. Your name is Nick Carter. You——"

"Stop a moment!" Nick cried, now that she had rushed blindly into the trap he had set for her. "You are not guessing, Madame Marvelli."

"Not guessing?"

"You know those statements are true. Shall I tell you how?"

"Tell me——"

"By the extract on this handkerchief, the odor of which you already have recognized—a fact that irrefutably connects you with the gang responsible for the death of Nora Bailey and the abduction of Doris Ellery."

Nick added the last with sudden threatening severity. He ended with dramatic force his rapid-fire colloquy with the angry woman. He threw off his disguise, leaned quickly over the table, whipped out the handkerchief again, and flourished it directly under her nose.

Madame Marvelli recoiled, with a half-smothered cry. She seemed suddenly to realize why the handkerchief had first been laid upon the table, the ruse by which she had been lured into self-exposure. For a moment she could not speak, but sat staring wildly at the detective's threatening face, while her own was as drawn and ghastly as that of the erring woman to whose tragic death she had been an accessory.

"Now, Madame Marvelli, I think we understand each other," Nick said sternly, resuming his seat. "I want the whole truth out of you, madame, and I'm going to have it."

"The whole truth?" she gasped, still staring.

"Either that, Madame Marvelli, or I'll take you along with me."

"Take me—where?"

"Where do you suppose? To the police station, of course, under arrest for murder."

"Under arrest?"

"As sure as——"

Nick cut short his threat—a key had been thrust into the lock of the outer door. He turned quickly in that direction, reaching for his revolver. Before he could grasp it, however, a gruff voice from behind him cried sharply:

"Stop! Don't touch that gun. Before you can pull it, Carter, there'll be a bullet in you."

Nick swung round in his chair.

Two men stood in the open doorway of the adjoining room, each with a revolver aimed at his head.

"Shove up your hands, and keep quiet," one cried, with a growl. "We've got the drop on you."

Quick steps sounded in the direction from which Nick had entered, and he glanced sharply over his shoulder. A third man was hurriedly entering, thrusting a ring of keys into his pocket—the same man met in the Ellery mansion on the morning after the crime, the alleged German scientist, Professor Jaynes.

"Dave Lascar again!" flashed through Nick's mind. "I've struck oil!"

Madame Marvelli started up, with a coarse, ironical laugh.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER TRUE COLORS.

Nick Carter gazed sharply at Madame Marvelli. The laugh of the charlatan had grated harshly on his ears. Her malignant face, her mocking leer, the exultant light in her evil eyes—these told the story.

"Oh, this is your doings, eh?" Nick cried, coolly meeting the unexpected turn of affairs. "Very well done, madame. I'll not forget it when the day of reckoning arrives."

"Never mind whose doings it is, Carter," growled the man who had held up Nick. "You sit quiet and keep your hands on the table. If you don't, you'll find this your own day of reckoning. Drop back of his chair, Tom, and get his guns. I'll keep him covered."

He strode into the room while speaking, a tall, powerful man of about forty, whose dark features were partly hidden with a heavy black beard. Nick not only saw at a glance that the man was disguised, but also identified him immediately as a criminal lawyer

of somewhat shady reputation, and of whom Stanley Hannaford had spoken so unfavorably.

"Matt Gregory," thought Nick. "The game is shaping up just as I expected. Tom Farley, too, the discharged convict. Not even in disguise, eh? The rascals evidently mean business."

The latter, a muscular fellow in the thirties, with a sinister, pallid face, stamped with the shifty expression of a criminal, had crouched beside the detective's chair and was hurriedly securing his revolver.

Nick glanced down at him, saying curtly, while the others stood gazing:

"So it's you, Farley, eh?"

"That's what," leered the rascal, looking up for a moment.

"And up to your old tricks."

"It's hard to teach an old dog new ones."

"Dog is right."

"Beware of my teeth, then."

"I will. I'll soon put a muzzle on you."

"I guess not. The boot's on the other leg," Farley cried derisively, as he slipped one of Nick's weapons into his own pocket.

"You'll find another on my other hip," Nick said coolly. "You'd better get it—lest I get you."

"I'll leave you nothing to get me with," Farley retorted. "I know you too well for that. These bracelets, too, will come in handy. I'll see how they fit, if you'll shove your flippers behind you. Look sharp!"

Nick made no resistance. He thrust his arms behind him and his wrists were quickly secured in his own handcuffs. Not content with this alone, however, Farley deftly slipped a piece of rope through the chain and bound his hands close to his back.

"I know you of old," sneered the scamp, meantime. "You can give Houdini cards and spades in the game of getting out of bracelets. I'll head that off, all right."

"Don't bank too heavily on it," Nick advised.

"You leave it to me; I know my business," Farley retorted, rising. "There he is, pals, powerless enough for the present."

Gregory slipped his revolver into his pocket.

Madame Marvelli, after darting to the window and drawing the curtains still closer, had returned to her seat.

In the meantime, without having spoken since he entered, the pretended German professor stood watching the doings of his confederates. His bearing proclaimed him the leader of the gang. He had spread the skirts of his black frock coat, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

An evil light was in his frowning black eyes, yet his face wore a smile, a leer of mingled mockery and contempt, rendered the more threatening and repulsive by the gleam of his sharp white teeth through his parted beard.

"That is very good—I will do the rest," he said significantly, with a nod of approval.

"Do what?" demanded Nick, turning sharply upon him. "What is it you are going to do?"

"Bury you so deep, Mr. Carter, that you couldn't be dug up with a steam shovel," was the icy rejoinder.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Do it, by all means, if you value your future safety, Doctor David Lascar," Nick said sternly. "You may as well fly your true colors, you rascal, for I know you despite your disguise."

Lascar smiled again and showed his teeth.

"Do you think that surprises me?" he asked.

"Does it not?"

"Far from it. You forget that I am a telepathist, that my mind is like a sensitive plate, susceptible to every thought wave from other minds, particularly those of a mind as virile and vigorous as yours."

"Humph!" Nick scornfully ejaculated. "You know very well, then, what I think of you."

"I sensed that you knew me yesterday morning, the instant that your eyes met mine," Lascar coldly proceeded, as if there had been no interruption. "I realized the moment I saw you that we were booked for trouble, that you were a factor to be reckoned with, an obstacle that must be overcome. I should have killed you on the spot, Carter, if I had not known, also, that you would not arrest me, not even expose me."

"Wait a while and see," Nick said pointedly.

"You are like a mole that travels underground. You do your work under the surface. You hide your hand and cover your tracks, Carter, and you never strike until sure a vulnerable spot can be reached. I knew you would neither arrest nor expose me, therefore, while you were still in the dark."

"Light follows darkness, Lascar. No night so black that dawn does not succeed it."

"Save that night called—death."

"You know not what follows that."

"Nor shall I suffer you to hasten the experience that will enlighten me," Lascar pointedly asserted. "I

sensed trouble from you, nevertheless, yet did not expect it so quickly. For one who works underground and in the dark, your celerity is remarkable. You are, indeed, Carter, one to be feared."

"I have taught you that, at least."

"Not that alone, Carter, as you will learn. I shall leave no rathole open for you this time."

"You'd better not," Nick advised.

"Lest I might, your mere presence being a menace, we will hasten your removal to absolute safe quarters," Lascar retorted more sharply. "Press his linen collar a little lower, Mr.——"

"Gregory," Nick put in quickly, when Lascar hesitated, upon noting the lawyer's warning glance. "You may as well speak plainly, for I know you, also, Gregory, and when you next appear in court you'll stand, not in the bar, but in the prisoner's dock. Take my word for that. I know you, one and all."

"You be hanged," Gregory said, with a snarl. "Threats cut no ice."

"Nor will your knowledge avail you anything," Lascar quickly added. "I shall guard against that."

"If capable of it," Nick said bluntly.

"Do what I directed, Gregory."

The lawyer strode behind Nick and drew down his linen collar. Lascar produced a small leather case from his pocket, out of which he took a small vial and a hypodermic syringe. He filled the latter from the vial, then approached quickly and thrust the needle into Nick's neck, injecting the entire contents of the syringe.

The effect was almost immediate. A chill shot through Nick from head to foot. It was instantly followed by an overwhelming numbness. A mist swam before his eyes. The room suddenly began to whirl. The malignant face of Madame Marvelli, the gleam of Lascar's intent eyes, the touch of Gregory's hand, the circle of bright light on the fortune teller's table, and then the light itself—all were speedily swallowed up in the inky gloom of complete oblivion.

Doctor Lascar turned to the woman.

"The hamper again, Viola," he said complacently. "We'll get away with him as quickly as possible."

"The sooner the better, Dave," she replied, starting up.

"Luckily I was in Gregory's office when you telephoned. We came without delay, and timed ourselves to a second. I diverted his attention by entering that way, while Matt and Farley stole upon him from the rear room. 'Twas well done, and the rest should be easy. Bring the hamper, Viola; and you, Farley, lend her a hand."

CHAPTER VIII.

SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE.

It was six o'clock when Patsy Garvan, returning from the work assigned him by Nick, arrived home and entered the business office. He found Chick Carter and Joseph in earnest discussion, the former looking a bit excited, the latter grave and apprehensive.

Chick had come in only a quarter hour before, and now held in his hand a letter of information and directions left by Nick, the result of his experiment with the cat, the nature of which will appear in the immediate doings of his two assistants.

"Hello!" Patsy exclaimed, instantly detecting something wrong. "What's up?"

"Have you seen Gregory?" Chick abruptly asked.

"Yes."

"When, and where?"

"About eleven o'clock. I saw him go into his law office. It's in a building on Broadway. The worst of it is, Chick, whether he really intended to do so or not—he gave me the slip."

"Had he seen you?"

"No. I'm sure of that."

"It's not likely, then, that he planned to elude you."

"Unless he feared he might be watched, for all he had not seen me."

"You continued to watch his office?"

"Sure!" cried Patsy. "I listened at the door, and heard him talking with some one. I heard other voices, but didn't recognize them. I decided not to go in just then, thinking the men might come out. One of them answered a telephone call, but they were in an interior office all the time, and I couldn't distinguish what was said."

"How did you happen to lose them?"

"The talking ceased soon after I heard the telephone call," Patsy hurriedly explained. "I waited and listened for nearly ten minutes, thinking I'd hear them again. Then I got wise, and began to nose around. I found a back stairway and corridor adjoining Gregory's office, which has a rear door. After listening again, I opened it with a picklock. The office was deserted. The birds had flown."

"By the rear door."

"Sure! They couldn't have gone any other way."

"You have not seen Gregory since?"

"No. I bolted out, thinking I might overtake him, but I got left. Then I took a turn through Thirty-second Street, thinking I'd have a look at the fortune teller's place, but there was nothing doing."

"Are you sure of it?" Chick quickly demanded.

"Do you think there was?" questioned Patsy.

"Nick went there this morning."

"And hasn't showed up?"

"Not yet; and that's not the worst of it. How long did you watch the place?"

"Not more than five minutes, for my job was to get after Gregory. The door of Madame Marvelli's rooms was closed. There were two men on the sidewalk. They were loading a heavy wicker hamper into a wagon. It was filled with stuff for the laundry, for I heard one of them say 'twas an unusually heavy wash."

"How large was the hamper?"

"Oh, a big square one, with a canvas tied over the cover. It was——"

"Could Nick's body have been forced into it."

"Yes, easily, if——"

"There aren't any ifs, Patsy, in that case," Chick declared, interrupting. "Heavy wash be hanged! It was the chief who was heavy. That hamper contained Nick, either dead, or unconscious, Patsy, as sure as you're knee high to a grasshopper."

"You don't mean——"

"I mean that the gang has got him, that the telephone call to Gregory's office was from Madame Marvelli, and that he and his companions bolted for her place in answer to it. They've landed Nick, and mean business, as sure as there's milk in a coconut. Ring for Danny and the auto. I'll explain on the way. We have no time to lose."

"Explain what?" asked Patsy, mystified, while Joseph hastened to ring for the touring car.

Instead of replying, Chick tossed him the missive left by Nick. It briefly stated the conclusions at which he had arrived after his experiment with the cat, also his designs in visiting Madame Marvelli, together with directions for Chick and Patsy in case he failed to return promptly.

Patsy's eyes opened wider while he read. He glanced at Chick, who had hurriedly put on a simple disguise and was slipping an aditional revolver into his pocket, and, without a word, Patsy threw down the letter and followed suit.

Both left the house a little later, and hastened out to the waiting car. Chick gave Danny his instructions, directing him to drop them half a block east of Madame Marvelli's quarters, and to lose no time in getting there. The dusk of early evening had begun to fall when they arrived at their destination, and both proceeded on foot to the fortune teller's rooms.

"What if she's not there?" asked Patsy.

"We'll not figure on that until we know she's absent," Chick gravely answered. "We've got to find Nick by some hook or crook. These rascals mean business, or they wouldn't have got away with him in that fashion in broad daylight. Lascar has it in for him, all right, and will not shrink an instant from putting him out of the way. That's the only safe course for the rascal."

"By Jove! there's a light in the woman's rooms," Patsy abruptly announced.

"So I see."

"We have got her cornered, all right. Can we force her to speak—that's the main thing."

"Nick evidently felt confident of it, or he would not have left us these instructions. I think he's right, too. I don't believe she'll stand for the ordeal."

"Shall I come in?" asked Patsy, when they arrived at the door.

"Wait in the vestibule," said Chick. "She may become alarmed if she sees two of us, and try to close the door. I'll signal you after getting in."

"Go ahead," nodded Patsy.

Chick stepped into the corridor and pressed Madame Marvelli's bell. It was not answered for several moments, and when the woman appeared at the door it was evident that the two detectives had arrived in the nick of time.

Madame Marvelli was dressed for the street, clad in a showy outside garment and a hat of vast proportions.

"Good evening," said Chick. "You are Madame Marvelli?"

"Yes."

"I wish to talk with you a few minutes about——"

"You'll have to excuse me," Madame Marvelli interrupted, a bit curtly. "I have finished my work for the day. Call to-morrow."

"My business cannot be deferred until to-morrow," Chick replied, so placing himself on the threshold that she could not close the door. "It is very important. I must see you at once."

"Very well, though I can give you only a moment. You may come in."

A snap of Chick's fingers brought Patsy to his elbow, and both stepped quickly into the woman's apartments.

Then, for the first time, Madame Marvelli scented trouble. She drew back, turning pale and frowning darkly, and appeared to suspect the identity of her visitors.

"Why have you two come in here?" she demanded sharply. "What's the meaning of this?"

Chick did not mince matters, but came to the point at once.

"You know what I mean," he said curtly. "What has been done with him?"

"Done with him? What are you talking about?"

"You know. What has been done with him?" Chick sternly repeated.

"Done with whom?"

"Nick Carter."

"I don't know him—never heard of him. You are talking Greek to me. How dare you come here and browbeat——"

"You stop right there, Madame Marvelli," said Chick, thrusting her to a seat on the nearest chair. "Don't attempt to evade me, nor to put up a bluff of any kind, for we'll not stand for it a minute. We are detectives in Nick Carter's employ. We wish to know what has become of him. You can tell us. Out with it, then, or you'll find yourself in the hottest kind of hot water."

Though she had turned nearly as white as the knot of lace at her throat, Madame Marvelli made a desperate effort to pull herself together.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said angrily. "I don't know Nick Carter—never saw him. You are misinformed, if you think he——"

"See here!" Chick interrupted her with terrible severity. "Isn't one warning enough?"

"Warning?"

"You open your mouth to utter another lie, Madame Marvelli, and I'll have you under arrest and out of this place so quickly you'll forget your own name. Nick Carter was here at noon to-day. I know why he came and what occurred here. You telephoned to the office of Matt Gregory, the lawyer, who came here with two of his rascally running mates. They contrived to hold Nick up, and he was taken from this place a little later in a wicker hamper. You know where he was taken and where he now can be found. Out with it, Madame Marvelli, or you go with us."

Although, obviously enough, she now realized that her situation was much worse than she had feared, Madame Marvelli did not wilt. She drew herself up, as ghastly as death itself, and protested angrily:

"That is false—I know nothing about it. I never knew a lawyer named Gregory. If Nick Carter came here, I did not see him. I was not here at noon. I know nothing about——"

"That's enough," cried Chick, checking her torrent of denials. "We'll see elsewhere whether we can get the truth out of you. Signal for the car, Patsy. Have it brought to the door."

Patsy rushed out to obey.

Madame Marvelli started to her feet.

"You're not going to arrest me—you shall not!" she cried, trembling with passion.

"Is that so?" Chick whipped out a pair of handcuffs. "You'll go quietly—or you'll go in these."

"You're a brute."

"You'll find I mean what I say."

"But——"

"There aren't any buts, Madame Marvelli. You're going with me, unless you give me the information I want. That's all there is to it."

"But I don't know——"

"Cut that out. I shall know when you're telling the truth—and I'll find a way to make you tell it. Take my word for that."

Madame Marvelli saw that denials were useless, and she took another tack. She threw up her head defiantly, saying scornfully, with an angry flash of her black eyes:

"Do what you please, then, since you refuse to believe me. I'll have redress for the outrage, however, if there's any law in the land."

"There's more law than you'll care to face," Chick dryly declared.

"Is that so?" sneered the woman. "You'll find, whoever you are, that you have nothing on me. I'll not open my mouth again, do what you will."

"You'll change your mind," Chick said bluntly. "Come on—or you'll be removed forcibly."

Patsy had returned, and the whir of the motor car could be heard from outside.

Madame Marvelli appeared inclined to resist, but thought better of it. Gathering up her skirts, she shrugged her shoulders scornfully and followed Chick to the street. Patsy remained only to turn out the lights and close the door, and half a minute later the car was speeding back to the detective's residence.

Madame Marvelli appeared relieved upon seeing that, instead of to a police station, she had been taken to a dwelling house. She thought she was to be subjected to further questions, to a third-degree ordeal. She felt that she was entirely equal to them, and there was a sneer of contempt on her gray lips when she accompanied Chick and Patsy into the house.

Joseph met them in the lighted hall.

"All ready?" Chick asked shortly.

"Yes, sir, as you directed," Joseph gravely nodded.

He turned and led the way to an interior room. It was brightly lighted. A table had been set aside, and a single armchair stood in the middle of the room, ominously prominent. On the table were several [illegible] of rope, a strip of white cloth, and a sponge.

Madame Marvelli drew back when she saw them, though she did not then anticipate for what these ominous preparations had been made.

Chick ended her hesitation by thrusting her into the room, saying in a way convincing her she had no alternative:

"Remove your hat and garment, Madame Marvelli, and sit down in that chair."

The woman obeyed, frowning angrily again, though she evidently was more moved with resentment and curiosity than with any apprehension of personal violence. She sat down without speaking, and fell to eying the three men darkly.

Chick closed the door and laid aside his hat.

"Go ahead," he said shortly. "Make her fast in the chair."

Both Patsy and Joseph seized a piece of rope, and before Madame Marvelli could make a move to resist, they had passed the rope across her body and around her arms, which they quickly proceeded to bind to those of the chair.

"What's the meaning of this?" she cried in protest, rapidly turning pale. "You have no right to treat me in this way. Even if under arrest, you have no right to commit this outrage."

"We'll usurp the right, then," Chick said bluntly. "We shall treat you as others have been treated."

"What do you mean by that?"

Chick did not reply for a few moments. He waited until the woman had been securely bound in the chair, so securely that she scarce could move her head. Then he took something from under the strip of cloth on the table and held it before her eyes.

"Did you ever see this, Madame Marvelli?" he asked curtly.

It was the antique vial, still half filled with the mysterious fluid.

"Ah! you need not speak," Chick quickly added. "Your face answers my question. You know all about this infernal stuff."

Madame Marvelli had turned as ghastly as death itself. She tried to shrink, but was held powerless in the chair. A criminal bound for execution, waiting only the turn of a switch to send him to his death, could not have looked more terrified. A gasp of horror broke from her, yet she impulsively cried:

"I never saw it. I know nothing about it."

"We'll soon determine that?"

"What do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"Try it on you," Chick sternly declared. "Through you, one woman already has been sent to her doom. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. You shall have a full dose of your own medicine, Madame Marvelli. We'll see in how far we are right—and whether you'll give us the information we want."

"I know nothing about——"

"Silence! You waste your breath with vain denials. We'll see what effect this will have on you."

"You have no right—I'll shriek for help," screamed the woman, whose abject terror was ample evidence of her knowledge and guilt.

"Shriek as loud as you like. You'll not be heard."

"You'll drive me mad! I'll not suffer you to——"

"You shall suffer all that this infernal stuff inflicts," Chick sternly interrupted, removing the stopper from the vial.

Madame Marvelli uttered shriek upon shriek and began to struggle, vainly striving to break her bonds.

Chick turned quickly to Patsy.

"The sponge—hold it for me," he cried. "I'll pour the stuff upon it. You, Joseph, hold the strip of cloth. Stretch it in front of her face. We'll bind the sponge over her mouth and nostrils. Never mind her cries."

The preparations were made even while he was speaking, and their effect upon the horrified woman was all that Nick's letter had predicted. She threw back her head with one violent effort, crying wildly:

"Wait—wait! I'll confess—I'll tell all!"

"Tell me at once, then," Chick thundered. "Where is Nick Carter?"

"In Gregory's shore house, near Baychester."

"And Doris Ellery?"

"She, too, is there."

Chick tossed the empty vial upon the table and seized his hat.

"Look after her, Joseph," he shouted. "Come on, Patsy. I know the place. We have no time to lose."

CHAPTER IX.

A BID FOR FREEDOM.

Nick Carter threw off sooner than was expected the effects of the drug administered by Doctor Lascar. The latter had underestimated the detective's vitality and iron constitution, and, though a dose had been ad-

ministered that would have overcome most men for an entire day, scarce eight hours had passed when Nick began to revive.

Returning consciousness brought, at first, only a vague realization of what had occurred. Nick found himself in darkness, lying on a bare floor, with his feet bound and his arms still secured behind him. He felt dazed, stiff, and sore, and some time elapsed before he could clear the cobwebs from his brain and recall just what had happened.

"Drugged by the rascals and brought to this place," he muttered, when it all came back to him. "That's what Lascar meant when he said he'd do the rest and remove me to safe quarters. Safe quarters, eh? That remains to be seen. I'll make a bid for freedom, at all events. I wonder where I am."

Turning to look around, Nick discovered a window. He could see a patch of sky studded with stars, the light from which barely relieved the gloom of his surroundings. He soon made out, nevertheless, that he was in a small bare room, entirely destitute of furniture, and it evidently was an upper room in a house. He could hear the leaves of trees rustling in the wind, and the tips of branches touching a near roof.

Nick could hear no sounds from below, however, though from some quarter not far removed the fall of light footsteps reached him, audible only because his ear was so near the floor. They fell with steady, monotonous regularity that could have only one significance.

"Some one pacing to and fro," thought Nick, after listening intently for several minutes. "Some one in a near room on this floor. The tread is too light for that of a man—by Jove! I have it. Doris Ellery. I'll wager my reputation. The rascals have brought me to the same house in which she has been imprisoned. Thinking me down and out, they have put me here while engaged in other devilry—possibly making preparations for my finish. I'll see about that."

Convinced that none of the gang then was within hearing, Nick rolled over on the floor and made his way to the window. Rising with some difficulty, he gazed out upon a stretch of clear land nearly forty feet below, a bank of surrounding woods, through breaks in which patches of tossing sea could be discerned in the starlight.

"An isolated shore house, possibly broken into by the rascals, or owned by one of the gang," Nick reasoned. "I'm in a room on the top floor, and probably locked in. Not far from nine o'clock, eh?"

Looking up at the stars, he discovered the belt of Orion, the location of which told him the hour. Incidentally, too, he made another discovery—that the eaves protruding above the window were provided with a heavy copper gutter, evidently within reach from the window sill and presenting the only available means of escape.

"It's worth trying," Nick quickly decided. "If there is no means of descent, I can at least scramble to the roof, or reach the window of another room, and, perhaps, find a way out of the scrape."

Dropping upon the floor again, he worked his way to the door, both to listen and examine the lock. He could hear nothing from without. The door, instead of being locked, was double bolted on the outside, and was provided with an iron thumb latch, instead of an ordinary knob. Nick no sooner discovered the downward crook of the latch than he was hit with an idea.

"By Jove! that will help to liberate me," he said to himself, rising to his feet again. "I'll wager I can break this marline with it."

Turning his back to the door, Nick gradually worked the stout cord under the iron crook, taking care not to rattle the latch. He then was able to use all of his strength in an effort to break it. The effort proved successful. The marline parted after a moment, and Nick then worked his hands in front of him, and by means of a trick known only to himself and his assistants, he quickly removed the handcuffs. To liberate his feet then required but a very few moments.

"Good enough so far," he muttered. "If discovered, I can at least put up a fight, and it shall be one these rascals will remember."

Knowing it would be impossible to force the door without inviting discovery, Nick returned to the window. Raising it noiselessly, he leaned out and looked around. Two stories below was the glow from a lighted window, and near one corner of the house was the dark outline of an automobile, convincing him that his captors then were in the house. Some twelve feet to his left, and on the same floor, a feeble light was shed from another window, which Nick at once determined to reach.

Dropping both sections of his own window, he climbed through the opening and stood on the sill outside, grasping the casing to steady himself. By stretching upward, he then could grasp the copper gutter, which he tested and found sufficiently strong to support him. He did not shrink for a moment from the hazardous undertaking, though a fall to the ground meant broken limbs, if not a broken neck.

"Here goes!" he murmured. "I'll find out whether she is in that room. At the worst, I can return to this one, or contrive to draw myself to the roof."

Grasping the gutter with both hands, Nick swung clear of the window. Then, hand over hand, he began to work himself toward the other. He reached it in half a minute, and, gently placing his foot on the sill for support, he peered through a thin scrim curtain and into the room.

It was a cheaply furnished chamber. The door was closed. A candle burned on the mantel. The solitary occupant no longer was pacing to and fro, but was seated on a narrow bed, a girl in a navy blue street suit, whose photograph Nick then had in his pocket. But the face at which he gazed then looked pale and haggard, stamped with fear, anxiety, and almost unbearable suspense.

Nick watched her for a moment, made sure no one else was in the room, and then he tapped on the window with the toe of his boot.

Miss Ellery turned like a flash in the direction of the sound. It came from a new direction, which alone was enough to bring with it a ray of hope. She faltered for an instant, then started up and drew aside the flimsy curtain—and beheld Nick's dark figure in the feeble light.

Just then, too, he was seen by another, unobserved and unsuspected—a gaunt, rough-clad man who at that moment emerged from a path in the near woods, and whose attention was directed to the movement of the curtain in the lighted window. He stopped short, gazed briefly at the dark figure of the detective, a silhouette on the lofty rectangle of feeble light—and then he darted noiselessly toward the house, around a corner of which he quickly vanished.

The light from within fell upon Nick's face. That it was the face of a stranger could have but one significance to the imperiled girl, and the light of quickened hope leaped up in Miss Ellery's eyes. She threw the curtain aside and hurriedly opened the window.

"Who are you? What are you doing there?" she asked impulsively.

"Hush! Not too loud," cautioned Nick. "I'm a detective and here to rescue you."

"Oh, oh, thank God! But, merciful heavens, you'll fall!"

"Don't fear. Drop the top of the window and I'll get in. Make no noise."

Doris hastened to obey, and in a very few moments Nick stood beside her in the room, closing the window and replacing the curtain.

"Speak low and answer me quickly, Miss Ellery," he said.

"You know me?" She gazed at him with augmented surprise. "How did you discover——"

"Do not delay to question me, for time is of value. My name is Nick Carter."

"The famous detective! Thank Heaven! I am already saved."

"Don't be too sure of that," Nick said gravely. "We are far from saved unless we can escape. That door is locked?"

"Yes, and bolted on the outside."

"How many are in the house?"

"One other woman and five men. The house belongs to a lawyer named Gregory, and he employs a man named Jones, who lives here with his wife. Gregory is here, also a man named Farley and one called Jaynes."

"I know him," Nick said grimly.

"There is one other, a large man with brown hair and whiskers."

"A disguise," said Nick. "The man is Doctor Devereau."

"The Mount Vernon physician?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

"He is in league with these rascals."

"I have been told that Nora Bailey, my maid, is dead, and that she was murdered by Stanley Hannaford," said Doris. "But that is impossible, utterly impossible! He could not be guilty of——"

"The woman is dead, but believe nothing you have been told," Nick interrupted. "Hannaford is under arrest, but is in no danger. This whole job is a scheme to incriminate him and coerce you."

"I was sure of it," Doris said hurriedly. "Gregory loves me, if such sentiments as his can be called love. He proposed to me about a month ago, and I rejected him. He resented it bitterly. I have feared him ever since."

"But you did not tell Hannaford?"

"No. I did not wish to annoy him. It might have caused trouble. I said nothing to any one."

"Not even to Nora Bailey?"

"No. She had trouble of her own."

"Of what nature?"

"I'm not quite sure. She had been to a fortune teller, who had warned her against something, or somebody," Doris rapidly explained. "She did not confide in me, but I discovered the fortune teller's name, and I went to her rooms to question her, thinking I might

be able to aid Nora, or relieve her of her apprehensions."

"I understand."

"Gregory must have known I was going there, for I was seized and drugged in the woman's rooms, and afterward brought to this place."

"By Gregory and Jaynes?"

"Yes. They were concealed in a back room. They were——"

"That's enough for the present," Nick interposed. "I have the whole case down pat, Miss Ellery. Just now, however, our escape is of sole importance. Have you courage to do what I direct?"

"Yes," Doris said quickly. "I fear nothing more than remaining here."

"I shall be heard if I undertake to force the door," Nick went on. "There is but one other way."

"The window?"

"Yes."

"But it is very high."

"I will knot the bedclothes together and lower you to the ground, after which I will follow you. By cutting some strips and twisting them together, I can make a rope strong enough to support either of us."

"Do so, and let me help you," Doris entreated. "I shall not shrink."

"I need no help," Nick replied. "It will take only a few minutes. We shall thwart the rascals, take my word for it."

"God grant it!"

Nick turned to the bed and hurriedly set to work—only to be speedily interrupted.

Without a sound that would have served to warn and prepare him, the door was suddenly thrown open. Four men with weapons drawn rushed into the room—Gregory, Lascar, Farley, and the gaunt fellow who had discovered Nick at the lofty window. Before the detective could make a move, he was covered by every weapon; and the cold, threatening voice of Dave Lascar was mingled with Miss Ellery's irrepressible cry of dismay.

"Hands up, Carter!" he cried. "You'll not thwart any one in this shack. Up with them, or out goes your light!"

Nick saw there was no sane alternative. He threw up his hands and turned to the trembling woman.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Ellery," he said coolly. "There were factors, evidently, upon which we did not reckon. Our design has been nipped in the bud; but for all that—the finish of these rascals has only been deferred."

"You may gamble on it, Carter, that your own has been hastened," Lascar cried sharply. "You'll be given no second chance for such a move. Secure him again, Farley, and make a better job of it than before. You, Jones, lend him a hand. Make him fast and bring both of them down. We'll end this business in short order."

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER'S DEFIANCE.

The scene was a brightly lighted room on the ground floor. Carefully lowered curtains and closed outer shutters precluded any view from outside, or the hearing of any sound from within.

Seated on a bench near one of the walls were Doctor David Lascar's several confederates—Gregory, Farley, Jones, and his wife, a gaunt, muscular woman of repulsive type, and the bearded man whom Nick rightly suspected was the Mount Vernon physician, Doctor Devereau. Grimly seated there in a row, they looked like members of a criminal-court jury in a capital punishment case.

Lascar occupied a chair at a small table at the end of the room. His pallid, sinister features were hard set. He looked bitter, merciless, and inflexible. A judge on the bench might have worn the same severe expression.

It awed and terrified Doris Ellery—she was seated a few feet in front of the knave.

Nick Carter occupied a chair near by. He again was bound hand and foot. He appeared, nevertheless, entirely unaffected by what had occurred, or was to transpire. He was waiting for the latter, content to bide his time. His strong, clean-cut face, however, was impressively austere.

Five minutes had passed since Nick was brought into the room, and Lascar was the first to break the prolonged silence. Gazing straight at Nick, he said coldly, with ominous deliberation:

"As you have done heretofore, Carter, you came very near fooling us to-night—so near that no second opportunity will be given you. You are too slippery a hound to be trifled with. Our business with you and this woman shall be brought to a culmination here and now. An agreement consistent with our demands must be arrived at, or the alternative—but an advance announcement of that would be premature."

"Not if the agreement depends upon me," Nick said sternly. "Understand one thing, Lascar, to start with! I never enter into an agreement with knaves, nor com-

promise in any degree with a gang of rascals. I shall make no exception of you miscreants."

Lascar ignored the epithets.

"The agreement does not depend upon you, Carter," he said icily.

"Very well."

"It depends upon this woman, Doris Ellery."

"I hope, then, that Miss Ellery will be governed entirely by my advice," said Nick, with a quick, significant glance at her. "In fact, Miss Ellery, I insist upon your doing what I direct."

"I will endeavor to do so, Mr. Carter," she answered tremulously, noting the detective's expression.

Lascar laughed in his cold, merciless fashion.

"Bold advice, Carter, but she will not follow it," he said, glancing from one to the other. "When men venture desperate deeds in the hope of attaining desired ends, they do not shrink, if failure confronts them, from wiping out of existence all who threaten them with exposure. Upon this woman's decision hang her fate, your own, and that of the man she loves."

"You——" Doris began to speak.

"Let me do the talking with this renegade," Nick quickly interposed. "I will answer for you."

"On the contrary, Carter, she shall answer for herself," said Lascar, apparently unruffled. "For the present, moreover, I shall do most of the talking. Miss Ellery, you listen to me."

"Very well," she replied more firmly, encouraged by Nick's defiant attitude; "I am listening."

"I shall be brief," said Lascar, with sinister assurance. "The situation can be quickly laid before you. In bringing about your abduction, we had only two objects in view. You are a very wealthy woman, worth several millions, at least."

"A part of which you aim to secure?"

"Yes."

"What part?"

"Our demand is not exorbitant, under the circumstances. We shall be content with half a million—a sum you will hardly miss," Lascar coolly argued. "If you decide to yield this point, I will devise a way to insure secrecy and prompt payment—a way consistent with our own personal safety."

"What is your other demand?" Doris asked.

"That is more personal."

"Personal?"

"You are not only a very wealthy woman, but a very beautiful woman," Lascar proceeded. "Your hand has been vainly sought by one of our number—upon whom it must now be bestowed."

"You refer to Matthew Gregory?"

"Yes."

"I suspected as much."

"Briefly stated, Miss Ellery, you must agree to marry Gregory. The ceremony must be performed, in fact, before you are liberated. And, indeed, you might do worse. Gregory is a man whom most women——"

"Omit, I beg, all needless details," Miss Ellery put in scornfully. "What more is required of me?"

"Nothing—of you."

"Of whom, then?"

"Of Nick Carter."

"What of him?"

"A pledge from him that he will immediately drop this case, maintain absolute secrecy, and in no way, either directly or indirectly, take further action against us."

"Will you accept such a pledge from him?"

"Yes."

"How do your know he will keep it?"

"I know the man. If he makes a promise—I know he will keep it."

Nick smiled a bit grimly.

"That's right, Lascar," he said bluntly. "So I will—if I make one."

"You will do so, Carter?"

"May I be hanged for it, Lascar, if I do!" Nick exclaimed.

"You will be worse than hanged, if you don't," Lascar pointedly retorted. "We shall take no further chances with you. What is your answer, Miss Ellery? That is of more immediate interest."

Doris glanced at the detective. He did not speak, but his eyes had a light in them that encouraged her to reply.

"I shall be governed by Mr. Carter's advice."

"You will?" Lascar's brows knit quickly.

"Yes. What shall my answer be, Mr. Carter?"

"A flatfooted refusal," Nick said forcibly. "Refuse, Miss Ellery, even to consider the demands of these knaves. Enter into no compromise whatever with them."

Doris turned to the man at the table.

"You have my answer," she said firmly.

"Your final answer?" Lascar's voice took on a more vicious ring.

"Yes."

"Have you considered the alternative?"

"You have not mentioned the alternative."

"Your own death."

"One can die but once."

"Nick Carter's death."

"It will be no worse for him than for me."

"Stop a moment!"

Lascar jerked his chair nearer the table. He appeared hit with another idea. Disappointment was reflected in the faces of his listening confederates, but the eyes of this arch-rascal were gleaming with desperate determination, and his thin red lips were twitching like those of a vicious dog.

"A worse fate for you now occurs to me," he added quickly. "We will liberate you—we will let you live."

"Very well."

"But you shall live only to mourn the trial, conviction, and execution of the man you love. What say you to that?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Stanley Hannaford is under arrest for murder," Lascar forcibly continued. "He will be tried for the crime. The evidence against him is almost conclusive. It is in my power to add facts that will insure his conviction—his execution. What now?"

Miss Ellery hesitated for the fraction of a second. She had become even more ghastly, and her lips were quivering piteously. Language could not describe the look of despair that had settled on her face. Nevertheless, she answered simply:

"I still have nothing to say."

Lascar was quick to detect that he had touched a vulnerable point, and Nick also saw that the girl was weakening.

"Nothing to say?" cried Lascar, sharply watching her.

"Nothing."

"That is your answer?"

"Yes."

"Your final answer?"

"Yes."

Lascar turned like a flash to the several men on the bench.

"Farley—Jones!" he cried sharply, pointing to a stout iron hook in the ceiling. "Be quick! We will begin at once the work of extermination."

The two men leaped up.

Farley produced a long rope from behind his chair. He quickly threw it over the iron hook, while Jones attached to one end of it a heavy iron block, weighing fully a hundred pounds. They drew it up nearly to the ceiling, then made the rope fast to a ring in the side wall of the room.

"Place him directly under it," said Lascar, pointing.

The two knaves seized the detective's chair, and drew it under the suspended iron block. It hung directly over Nick's head, some six feet above it. If it were to fall, as would follow if the rope running from hook to ring, as tense and taut as a bowstring, were to be cut—there could be but one result.

Nick Carter's head would be crushed like an egg-shell.

There could be only one meaning to such terrible preparations—and the face of Doris Ellery had become as ghastly as if the hand of death had been laid upon her.

Nick Carter glanced at the girl, but did not speak.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DETECTIVE ART.

Though his drawn features were stamped with a look of diabolical determination, Lascar's hard, merciless voice underwent no perceptible change. He fixed his piercing black eyes upon Miss Ellery, and said sharply:

"We'll see whether that will be your final answer. Take out your knife, Farley, and be ready at a word from me to cut that rope."

Farley had the knife out before the miscreant had finished speaking.

"I'm ready, Dave," he announced, and none doubted that he would obey.

"Now, Miss Ellery, listen to me," said Lascar. "One word from me will send Nick Carter to instant death. Don't you, on your part, imagine for an instant that these preparations have been made only for a bluff, only with a design to intimidate you. As surely as you persist in your refusal to yield to our demands, I will speak the word that will send Nick Carter to his

doom. It is in your power to save him. It is in your power to save Hannaford, the man you love, from conviction and execution. Their fate is in your hands. The situation is up to you. Now, then, what is your answer. Refuse still—and I will instantly order Farley to cut that rope."

Lascar pointed to his waiting confederate.

Farley stood with the knife upraised.

Doris Ellery, as white as death, was trembling from head to foot. She tried to speak, but her voice failed her. Her colorless face, however, showed that she was about to yield—and then, though not until then, the voice of Nick Carter rang through the room.

"Stop a moment," he cried. "I have something to say to you, Dave Lascar."

The interruption came so unexpectedly, and in a way was so impressive, that Lascar turned almost involuntarily to the apparently powerless detective.

"About what?" he curtly demanded.

"About the existing situation," Nick said sternly. "You'd better hear, too, what I have to say. Your own safety depends on it."

"My safety—bah!" Lascar scornfully cried. "But I will hear you."

As a matter of fact, Nick only wanted Doris Ellery to hear, that her fears might be somewhat dispelled, her eyes opened to the truth, and the consent withheld that was trembling on her lips. Without a glance at her, however, Nick at once proceeded.

"As regards this girl," he cried; "you have no idea of taking her life. At the most, you will demand only her money, the payment of a ransom, and she can meet that demand without any sacrifice of self. If you were to kill her, you would lose everything—and you rascals will never take that step. I know your knavish ilk too well to believe that."

"Hark you, Carter! We——"

"Hear me out, for that was only a minor point," Nick interrupted. "As regards myself, you know that I, if free, will never rest till I have run you down, and you have not the slightest intention of sparing my life. If you were to set me free, in order to blind this girl into yielding to your demands, it would be done only in some way by which my death could be insured without her knowledge. You lie, Lascar, when you say it is in her power to save my life."

Lascar, livid with rage, half started from his chair and swung round toward Farley.

"Stop!" Nick thundered. "What I next have to say concerns—you!"

Lascar turned to him again, suppressing his fury.

"Speak, then," he cried harshly. "It cannot matter."

"It relates both to you and to the woman found dead in the Ellery mansion two days ago," Nick went on even more impressively, for a furtive glance had told him that the listening girl fully appreciated the points he was so artfully bringing to her notice. "I will begin with you, Lascar, and show you where you and your rascally gang stand at this moment."

"We know where we stand."

"You do not! You are all at sea."

"Why do you say that?"

Lascar spoke with a sneer, but his interest was again aroused, and that was all that Nick wanted at that moment.

"I'll tell you why," he sternly answered. "To begin with, you succeeded in escaping from prison by feigning death, a physical condition you were able to bring about by means of some subtle drug, a knowledge of which was handed down to you from those arch-poisoners of two centuries ago, Exili and Marie Brinvilliers. I once have sent you to prison for knavery of a like kind—and I shall do the same again."

"You'll never do it with your tongue, Carter," sneered Lascar. "What are you driving at?"

"Your supposed dead body was sold to one Doctor Devlin for dissection," Nick went on. "He was in league with you, however, and had the secret means with which to revive you. His name was an alias. The man was Doctor Devereau, the Mount Vernon physician, and he is seated on that bench."

Doctor Devereau started to rise and speak, trembling visibly, but Lascar suppressed him with a gesture.

"You know too much, Carter," he cried, with bitter irony. "Such knowledge is dangerous."

"Hear me out," Nick repeated. "Your escape having been effected, you planned with Devereau, Greg-

ory, and Farley, whom you had met in prison, to abduct this girl and bleed her out of a fortune. Incidentally, you discovered that her maid, known as Nora Bailey, had been consulting a fortune teller, Madame Marvelli, whom you induced to join you in the plot. You knew that the woman stood in fear of that man, Farley, because of relations with him years ago and disclosures that threw him into the hands of the police and sent him to prison. The woman's name, however, was not Nora Bailey. It was Lizzie Lowney."

Farley laughed grimly, but Lascar's heavy brows knit more darkly.

"How did you discover that, Carter," he demanded.

"That is only a part of what I have discovered," replied Nick, instead of explaining. "Lizzie Lowney was led to visit Madame Marvelli again. From her she received an antique vial, Lascar, containing a fluid impregnated with one of the noxious drugs discovered by Exili, and of the effects of which you were fully informed. It was given to Lizzie Lowney to be used as a perfume for her handkerchief. But it contained, Lascar, some subtle ingredient the odor of which, when inhaled continuously, so affects the brain as to cause a violent epileptic fit."

"See here, Carter——"

"Listen—for I'm going to show you where you stand," Nick forcibly interrupted. "You knew that the noxious stuff, inhaled by degrees by the woman, would sooner or later have its effect. So it did, Lascar—but not until after Stanley Hannaford had left her on the evening of her death."

"You are wrong——"

"I am right!" cried Nick, again interrupting.

"The woman was strangled by Hannaford. She did——"

"She was strangled by her own hand," Nick sternly declared. "She felt the illness seizing upon her, must have suspected the nature of it, and she knew also that a person subject to fits frequently thrusts a towel, or handkerchief, into the mouth to prevent biting of the tongue while in convulsions. That is what Lizzie Lowney did when she fell to the floor. She thrust her handkerchief into her mouth and was strangled by it while unconscious."

"You cannot prove——"

"I can prove all that I assert. The cut on her forefinger, caused by her own teeth; particles of skin, which I took from under her fingernail, left there when, in her convulsive haste, she caused the scratches on her chin, and which I have examined with a microscope; her torn collar, the fingermarks on her throat, the overturned chair and disordered rug—all were caused during her convulsive struggles, and they plainly told the story."

"But I tell you, Carter——"

"One word more and I'm done," Nick insistently interrupted. "I have made experiments proving all that I assert. You rascals are the true criminals. Stanley Hannaford is in jail only because I requested him to go there, that I might the more easily run you rascals down. He will never be tried for the death of that woman. He——"

"He will—he shall!" cried Lascar, then quite livid. "For you shall never reveal these facts, nor——"

"Facts—that's right," cried Nick pointedly. "And they will be revealed, Lascar, in spite of all you can do. For they already are known by my assistants. Madame Marvelli is by this time under arrest. You may kill me, if you will, but your plot against Hannaford and this brave girl will fall flat. As sure as fate itself, my assistants will finish my work—and finish you! So go ahead with the rope cutting, if you like—but you'll not escape the penalty."

Dave Lascar did not reply for nearly half a minute. He sat staring straight at the stern, defiant face of the detective, as mute and motionless as if turned to stone. Only the look of fiendish hatred on his distorted face and the vengeful fire blazing in his eyes—only these evinced the feelings aroused in him by Nick Carter's denunciation and disclosures, and the unexpected turn they gave to the situation he thought he had so well in hand.

For there had risen to the face of Doris Ellery a look that spoke louder than words, an expression revealing that threats no longer could intimidate her, nor fear cause her to submit to his demands.

Sullen mutterings from his confederates, quickly in-

creasing to bitter snarls, brought Lascar out of his abstraction, for he was momentarily staggered by the consummate genius and detective art with which the truth had been discovered and the tables turned. With the impulsive ferocity of one for whom only vengeance remained, he started to his feet, crying harshly:

"You may have won, Carter, but you have also lost. If there are penalties to be paid, your own shall no longer be deferred. Farley——"

The miscreant wheeled like a flash to his confederate. Pointing with his slender white hand to the tense rope, he shrieked commandingly:

"Cut it, Farley! Cut that rope!"

The command was mingled with a piercing scream from Miss Ellery.

Farley threw up his hand, and with a single slash with his knife severed the rope.

The iron block descended; it fell as swiftly as the blade of a guillotine, and landed with a crash upon—the floor.

For Nick Carter was not beneath it. He had artfully escaped it. With a lightninglike move of both feet, the instant he saw Farley's hand uplifted, Nick had pressed his toes to the floor and tipped himself and his chair over backward, at the same time throwing himself to one side. The falling weight missed him by a foot or more, and struck the floor with a violence that shook the house.

A yell of frantic rage broke from Lascar—but it was drowned by another and much more welcome sound.

It was the crash of a door hurled from its hinges. It fell to the floor as if beaten down by a thunderbolt. Over it, the instant it fell, bounded three figures, those of Chick Carter, Patsy Garvan, and Danny, each with a ready weapon. They had arrived scarce five minutes before, entering the house with a picklock, and had overheard only the last few words spoken in the room.

Farley, the first to see them, bounded toward the window.

Chick uttered a warning cry, a vain one, then brought the rascal down with a bullet.

"Hands up!" yelled Patsy. "I'll drop the next who moves!"

The fall of Farley was enough, however. Lascar, always careful of his life, instantly threw up his hands. The others followed suit, and in far less time than it takes to write it, the arrest was made and the several crooks were in custody.

Two hours later the entire gang, including Madame Marvelli, were safely landed in the Tombs, the first step toward the punishment they deserved and which they ultimately received.

All that remains to be stated may be told with few and simple words. The discoveries made by Nick Carter on the scene of the strange fatality, the shrewd deductions he had drawn, the conclusions at which he had arrived after his investigations and experiments—these had made possible the work that had culminated so successfully.

The gratitude of Stanley Hannaford and Miss Ellery, the latter's relief upon finding Nick uninjured after the unexpected rescue; her amazement, as well as that of the police and the public, when the truth concerning the identity and strange death of Lizzie Lowney was made known—all may be better imagined than described.

Not with gratitude alone, however, were Nick Carter and his assistants repaid for their splendid services. For both Hannaford and Miss Ellery insisted upon swelling their bank accounts with exceedingly generous checks, to the effect that Nick was compelled to regard it as one of the most successful cases, as well as one of the most curious mysteries, that he had ever handled.

THE END.

The story for next week is "The House of Slumber; or, Nick Carter's Work of a Day," and it is the account of one of the busiest days ever put in by the great detective and his assistants. The "House of Slumber" was almost as mysterious a proposition as the castle in the fairy tale of the "Sleeping Beauty," in which the princess and all the inmates were taking prolonged "Rip van Winkles;" and it took Nick Carter to do the work accomplished by the handsome prince of the fairy tale, although in a manner a little less romantic, but decidedly more thrilling. Out July 2nd. No. 760.

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